

Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE-MORGUE

24TH
ANNIVERSARY
HALLOWEEN
ISSUE!

ROOTS OF FOLK HORROR

FEATURING

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ANDY PACIOREK • SERBIAN VAMPIRES
& A TREASURE TROVE OF FORGOTTEN MOVIES!

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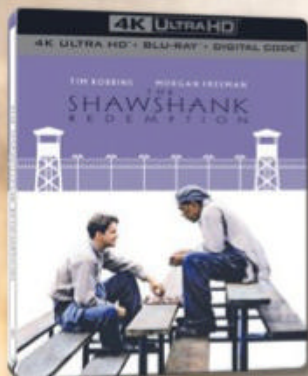
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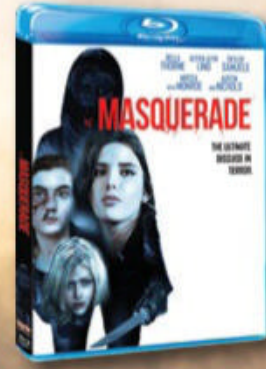
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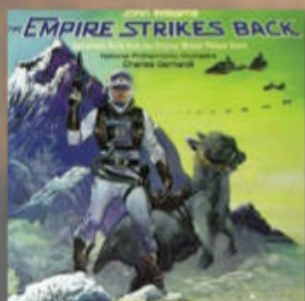
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STONE TEMPLE PILOTS



LEAVE A SCAR
DEE SNIDER



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GARBAGE



IT
BALLOON LAMP



FRIDAY THE 13TH
JASON MASK LAMP

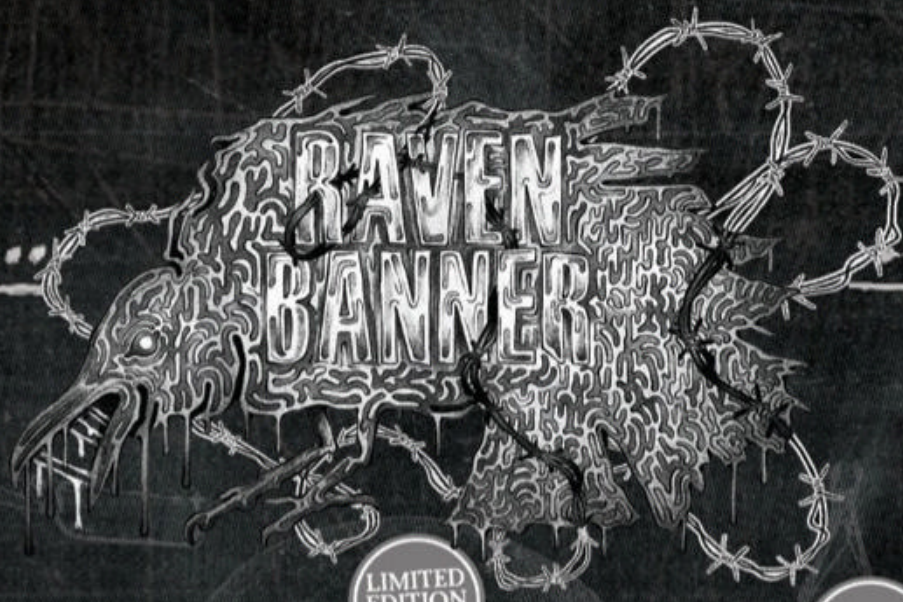


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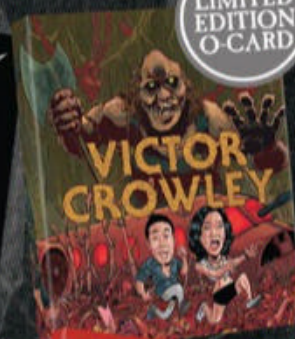
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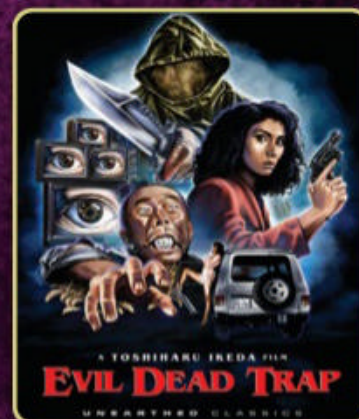
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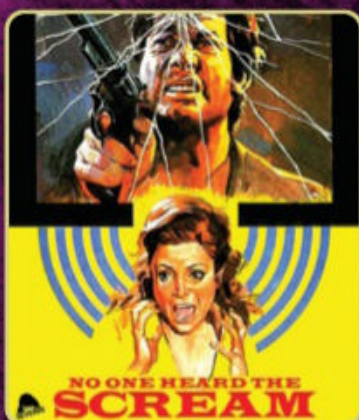
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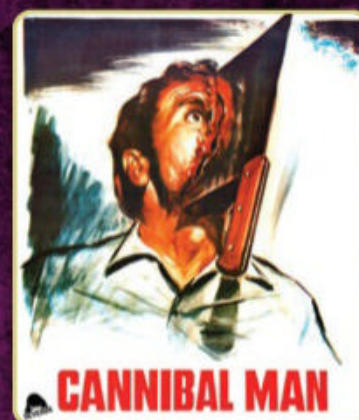
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12 TWISTED ROOTS OF FOLK HORROR

This Halloween, *Rue Morgue* celebrates the history, recent revival, and enduring legacy of a canon of films set in rural landscapes and steeped in weird folklore. With Robert Eggers, Kier-La Janisse, and Andy Paciorek.

PLUS! Djordje Kadijević's *The She-Butterfly*, composer Timothy Fife on contributing to the new audiobook for Arthur Machen's "The White People," and more!
by **ANDREA SUBISSATI**, **DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ**, **MICHAEL GINGOLD**, **ROCCO T. THOMPSON** and **PAUL CORUPE**

24 THIRTY THRILLING THREEQUELS!

Horror fans know the law of diminishing returns all too well, and nowhere is it more at play than in the dreaded third sequel of pretty much any movie you can name. But we wouldn't be doing our due diligence if we did not make you aware, dear reader, of the exceptions to the rule.

PLUS! Best Threequels in 3-D!
by **VARIOUS**

34 MOTHERS OF THE MEXICAN GOTHIC

Over half a century ago in Latin America, there arose a mini age of wailing women, vampire queens, and some of the greatest feminist horror movies you've never seen.

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by **LISA MORTON**

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At long last, one of horror's longest running franchises becomes a television series. A few killer words with killer doll creator Don Mancini.

by **ROCCO T. THOMPSON**

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Meet Micheline Pitt and Lynh Haaga, two innovative style mavens who are closing the gap between fan fashion and goth glamour with their boutique label La Femme En Noir.

by **ANDREA SUBISSATI**

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NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND

It's that time of year again! I live four blocks from the nearest Bath and Body Works and I can smell the pumpkin spice candles from here – which is handy, because it's hard to smell them in the store through my face mask. *Rue Morgue's* annual fall double issue represents several things – our anniversary, for one; another tickmark on my coffin lid; another thatch of grey hair on my head; another year of winning the battle against That Which Can't Be Helped (a.k.a. the various hurdles of existence as a niche print periodical, ranging from the economic to the epidemiological). But let's look on the bright side: I've got my Halloween costume picked out! I'm the girl from *Logan's Run*, squinting against the sunlight as I emerge from my geodesic dome, loosed to rejoin the untouched wilderness and live out the rest of my thirties (lol) in something resembling freedom.

But I have to admit that freedom isn't feeling the way I expected it to. Never mind the fact that we're not quite out of the proverbial woods yet, or that my liver appears to have aged ten years in the past two, or that my clothes seem to have all shrunk at once. I'm crashing into a full year's worth of FOMO and I'm realizing that I've become quite well adjusted to existence on my couch with my beloved 2960 x 1440 quad HD+ display and it's been keeping me up at night in more ways than one. Can actual human experience really compete with this slab of sensory instant gratification? And to what extent can I even expect it to?

You see, faithful readers, while some relax in the summertime reading campy fiction or beautifully designed Canadian horror mags, yours truly sat around fretting about a French philosopher called Jean Baudrillard. We first became acquainted about a decade ago – he died in 2007 but his hot takes on postmodern semiology and popular culture made him something of a hip cat in my alma mater's sociology department, and he came up a lot. I wasn't the biggest fan at the time – far from what you'd call accessible academia, his work required its own glossary of terms before you could *read* a sentence, much less comprehend it – but his 1981 philosophical treatise *Simulacra and Simulation* comes up every now and then on *The Faculty of Horror* podcast, which kept it fresh in my mind.

I'll attempt to summarize succinctly: JeanBo was concerned with a cultural trend he noticed where the human experience was increasingly reliant upon a constructed simulation of reality – the simulacra – that was made up of symbols and signs and other forms of meaning that only make sense within a specific cultural context. Like many a grumpy old sociologist, Baudy didn't have the most positive prognosis for the way society was headed. This hyper-reality, as he termed it, was just the latest form of Marx's concerns about alienation, and the result was a complacent populace taking commercial agendas as truth: confusing reality TV as reality, for example, or taking one tweet as if it represents popular opinion at large. Examples of this hyper-reality anxiety abound in science fiction movies, often to horrific, dystopian effect – consider *The Matrix* or *Total Recall*; if all we have to identify reality is our sensory experience of it, how are we capable of discerning what is real?

Anyway, back to post-lockdown neurosis. My thinking on the subject started leaning into Beaudrillard's intellectual turf after receiving Paul Corupe's Files From the Black Museum entry from *RM#200*, in which he likens our house-bound quarantine situation to that of the marooned scientists in 1964's *The Time Travelers*, where flickering electronic screens are not only technological marvels but a veritable lifeline to reality. It got me thinking that even though we've spent so much time physically apart, we *Rue Morgue* weirdos have been using the same movies for comfort and diversion, the same magazine for insight and community. Yes, we might have been distracting ourselves from a terrible predicament by stargazing but we've been looking up at the *same stars*, haven't we? If Baudrillard is right and we've created our own hyper-reality by looking through these same blood-spattered lenses, maybe we've actually been much closer to each other than we might have realized.

I know, I'm a huge nerd who could have just filled this page with the usual Happy Halloweenery that I normally employ to kick off our annual anniversary issue instead of dusting off my old grad school textbooks, but it's too late to return them and it's important to me that we don't look back on these difficult times as a complete loss (and I don't look back on my masters degree as a complete waste of time). The magazine you hold in your hands can't tweet or take your picture or lead you via GPS to the nearest Starbucks location but it's part of the (hyper) reality we're choosing to inhabit – and it's one I'll choose any day, not just Halloween.

Thanks for spending your lockdown with us... and HAPPY HALLOWEEN!



ANDREA SUBISSATI
andrea@rue-morgue.com

Horror in Culture & Entertainment
RUE MORGUE
MARRS MEDIA INC. RUE-MORGUE.COM
1411 DUFFERIN STREET, TORONTO, ONTARIO, M6H 4C7, CANADA
PH: 416.651.9675 FAX: 416.651.6085 EMAIL: INFO@RUE-MORGUE.COM
FB: FACEBOOK.COM/RUEMORGUEMAGAZINE TWITTER: TWITTER.COM/RUEMORGUE

STAFF

PUBLISHER RODRIGO GUDIÑO	EXECUTIVE EDITOR ANDREA SUBISSATI
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR MONICA S. KUEBLER	MUSIC EDITOR AARON VON LUPTON
ART DIRECTOR ANDREW WRIGHT	GAMES EDITOR EVAN MILLAR
OPERATIONS COORDINATOR MARIAM BASTANI	STAFF WRITER SEAN PLUMMER
FINANCIAL CONTROLLER MARCO PECOTA	HEAD ONLINE WRITER MICHAEL GINGOLD
INTERNS ALEXANDREA FIORANTE HARALAMBO KERIAZES	ONLINE MANAGING EDITOR ROCCO T. THOMPSON
MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS MANAGER JODY INFURNARI PH: 905-985-0430 E: jody@rue-morgue.com	ONLINE ASSISTANT EDITOR GRACE DETWILER
	SPECIAL PROJECTS MANAGER DAVE ALEXANDER

RUE MORGUE INTERNATIONAL
FABIEN DELAGE (FRANCE) facebook.com/RueMorgueFrance
CHARLOTTE STEAR (UK) facebook.com/RueMorgueUK
MOANER T. LAWRENCE (GERMANY) facebook.com/RueMorgueGermany
AARON SOTO (MEXICO) facebook.com/RueMorgueMexico

CONTRIBUTORS

DENMAN C. ANDERSON	LAST CHANCE LANCE
BENOIT BLACK	ALISON LANG
JOHN W. BOWEN	LISA MORTON
JAMES BURRELL	PASHA NIELSEN
PEDRO CABEZUELO	JOE O'BRIEN
BRYAN CHRISTOPHER	DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ
RYAN COLEMAN	GEORGE PACHECO
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RUE MORGUE #202 would not have been possible without the valuable assistance of Itsuki Yoshida, Josh Johnson, Scooter Jay, Trius Winery, the Spirits of the Woods, and Al McMullan.

Cover art: "The Blood on Satan's Claw" by John Pearson
Design by Andrew Wright

Rue Morgue magazine is published bi-monthly and accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, photos, art or other materials. Freelance inquiries can be submitted at Rue-Morgue.com.

Funded by the Government of Canada | **Canada**

RUE MORGUE Magazine #202 ISSN 1481 – 1103
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POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



THE NEW @ruemorguemag [RM#201] came in and I am happy as hell! It features a film I never even heard of but sounds awesome! Been a while since I saw something like that. Props to the *Rue* team for keeping it fresh!

@JEKYL6669, VIA INSTAGRAM

JUST TREATED myself to an early birthday present. Hard to believe it's my first subscription (after a decade-plus of buying individual issues), but here we are! Looking forward to months of terrifying delights!

@LAZRON, VIA TWITTER

JUST BIT THE BULLET and subscribed to @Rue-Morgue. At least now there will be the odd surprise among all the bills and junk mail.

@TIMMCGREGOR1, VIA TWITTER

FIRST OFF, I want to congratulate you guys on 200 issues. Great job! Now I think it's time to get down to more serious matters. For the past few issues, I've been reading your Post Mortem section and noticed that lately a lot of letters have been coming from very disgruntled male readers who have issues with the direction the magazine has taken since you took over from Dave Alexander. They all seem to be against diversity and the message you've been sending that everybody should be welcome in the horror community. As someone who has had Asperger's Syndrome his whole life, I wholeheartedly agree with your message and embrace the positivity you've been sending out that everybody should be included. Also, I want to say good job on the Gary Sherman interview in RM#199. I bought *Dead and Buried* and thought your coverage on it was well-timed. I also look forward to more of Stacie Ponder's Devil's in the Details column in future issues.

BEN KASTEN, VIA FACEBOOK

A BIG, BLOODY HAPPY 200th issue to *Rue Morgue* magazine! Andrea Subissati and her team continue to deliver incredible content 23 years into their run. All my love to everyone involved.

JUSTIN BEAHM, VIA FACEBOOK

I REMEMBER back when I was visiting Toronto in 1997 and seeing copies of your relatively small magazine at Suspect Video just off Bloor Street and grabbing a couple of them. I liked what I

saw and read and hoped this wasn't a one-off. I eventually found out where to write to subscribe and purchased the back issues I was missing, so I now have a complete set of all 200 issues and counting! As a lover of all things horror throughout my 57 years on this wicked planet, I found and still find great information in each well-written issue of your magazine. From Needful Things to historical nuggets of info to movies I might be interested in checking out, I find it all delightfully enjoyable. But my favourite section has to be the Ninth Circle and the associated sidebars. Although I truly enjoy all the staff that contribute to the Ninth Circle, a special shout-out, please, to Monica S. Kuebler and Dejan Ognjanović. They've introduced me to some amazing horror authors that I might not ever have heard about, if not for them. Thanks to everyone at *Rue Morgue* for 200 deliciously delectable issues and many more!

GREG REISER, VIA EMAIL

COME CELEBRATE with Michael Myers as he reads the 200th issue of *Rue Morgue* magazine!

THIRTEENTH FLOOR IMAGING, VIA FACEBOOK



RE: "ABSINTHE WITH ANDREA" on *Rue Morgue TV* – I have been a [*Rue Morgue*] reader since the first year and subscriber for quite a few years, would love to visit the Manor if we ever get to

Toronto. We will bring you a bottle of the good stuff.

G.M. DARK, VIA YOUTUBE

RE: "SYMPATHY FOR THE SEQUEL" on *Rue Morgue TV* – Alex West makes me want to watch these movies I hate all over again. I'll probably still hate them, but I'd still watch them again, when I normally never would. Ever.

WORD UNHEARD, VIA YOUTUBE

RE: "TERROR TAROT" on *Rue Morgue TV* – As a fellow tarot enthusiast, I'm always so excited to spot tarot cards in films. I recently rewatched *Final Destination 3* and the opening credits scene is full of tarot cards – a really interesting way of representing foreshadowing and the fates of all of the characters. I know it's not film, but the TV series *Penny Dreadful* also made great use of tarot cards (they actually released a specific deck inspired by the series which, of course, I had to get!). Looking forward to more entries in this series!

THE GLAMOUR GHOUL, VIA YOUTUBE

THERE ARE SO MANY frightfully wonderful leaders out there in the Horror/Halloween world, so keep being who you are and providing the world great scary things! One of those truly amazing leaders is Andrea Subissati, the editor and head grave robber at *Rue Morgue* magazine. Providing such a beautiful and thorough magazine, it is absolutely one of the scariest writings to come out on a regular basis! I know right now there are tons of youth glaring through the pages and being inspired to keep the scare going for generations to come – and some of us "older" folks are drooling over the pages as well. Keep being scary awesome, Andrea, and *Rue Morgue*, and here's to many great decades and new mag issues to come!

JC GREENING, VIA FACEBOOK

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POST MORTEM

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CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

ISSUE #
202

Most of 1963's [The Haunting](#) was shot through lenses that add a curvature to the walls, making the house seem even more strange.

In a series of unfortunate events, a bride in Uttar Pradesh, India, suffered a fatal heart attack during her Hindu wedding ceremony, prompting the families to agree that the bride's younger sister would wed the groom later that day.

The songs "Red Right Hand" by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, "Ride the Lightning" by Metallica, and "The Piper" by ABBA were all inspired by the Stephen King novel *The Stand*.

"The Pugilistic Stance" refers to a common condition of severely burned bodies, characterized by flexion of elbows, knees, hip, and neck, and clenching of hand into a fist — a "defensive" position fancifully likened to one adopted by boxers.

[Horror Express](#) (1972) is the second movie adapted from the novella "Who Goes There?" by John W. Campbell Jr. The first was *The Thing From Another World* (1951).

In 1968, Herschel Thornton of Atlanta, Georgia, opened the world's first drive-thru funeral home that featured five windows in which bodies could be viewed from the comfort of one's car.

The cloud effect in 1958's [The Crawling Eye](#) was achieved by nailing a piece of cotton wool to a photograph of a mountain.

According to an ancient Chinese text on a ritual called the Yili, there were rules for how long a parent could mourn their dead child. Infants who lived less than three months were prescribed one day of grieving for each month that the baby lived.

Veteran actor John Lithgow (*Dexter*, *Pet Sematary*) and cult icon Divine (*Pink Flamingoes*, *Tales From the Darkside*) were born on the exact same date: October 19, 1945.

On August 22, 1888 at around 8:30 p.m., a shower of meteorites fell on a village in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, paralyzing one man and killing another. This is considered the only credible case of death-by-meteorite.

Mexico's Germán Robles became the first actor to show fangs as a vampire in [El vampiro](#) (1957), shortly before Britain's Hammer Films' [Horror of Dracula](#) (1958).

Cosmologists Fred Hoyle, Thomas Gold, and Hermann Bondi developed the Steady State Theory of the universe, an alternative to the Big Bang, after seeing 1945's [Dead of Night](#). They said that the circular nature of the plot inspired the theory.

The world's first robotic self-portraits, painted by an android called Ai-Da, were unveiled at an art exhibit in London this past May, despite the "artist" not having a "self" to portray. The creepy images question the role of artificial intelligence in human society, said curators.

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If 2021 was a [Halloween](#) costume, what would it be?

A shrug emoji with a hatchet.

@KEVINSHAUNTEDTOYBOX,
VIA INSTAGRAM

It would be one of the old vinyl monstrosities from the '70s. You know, bad mask with elastic string and too-narrow eyeholes, splitting at the seams...

@DEMONPREACHER, VIA TWITTER

A sexy haz mat.

@JOODDITYART, VIA INSTAGRAM

Clown suit. Seriously.

@SAVAGESINISTER, VIA INSTAGRAM

Toni Collette from *Hereditary*, 100%.

@ASSYJACK, VIA TWITTER

A bucket of literal shit.

KIM SAUTER-BRUNETTE, VIA FACEBOOK

FINAL WORDS

AS CAPTIONED BY YOU ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA



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THE TEXARKANA MOONLIGHT MURDERS

Charles Pierce's *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* is an odd artifact of '70s horror.

Released in 1976, it suffers from a bit of an identity crisis; framed as a mockumentary, it has proto-slasher elements from just before *Halloween* fully established the formula and takes some ill-advised tangents into comic relief. But despite its inconsistent tone, it does succeed at conveying the terror that gripped a small Southern town during the Texarkana Moonlight Murders.

From late February through early May of 1946, a series of attacks rocked Texarkana, a tiny town in Texas at the Arkansas border. Dubbed "The Phantom Killer," a man in a white cloth mask with the eyes cut out attacked three couples parked in various lovers' lanes as well as a married couple in their own home. The killer shot, beat, and in one case sexually assaulted his victims with a pistol, leaving five dead and the entire town in a state of panic. Gun shops were cleared out by terrified residents, housewives holed up at the local hotel when their husbands were away, and homeowners set up makeshift security systems on their properties.

As the story permeated the press, an influx of law enforcement flooded the town to solve the crimes, including the Texas Rangers. Nearly 400 people were arrested in connection with the killings, but no one was ever convicted; even today, the Texas Department of Public Safety refers to the Texarkana Moonlight Murders as "the number one unsolved murder case in Texas history."

As years passed, the crimes evolved into legend and word of mouth carried the story further from reality into increasingly fictionalized accounts, including the '76 film that added significant narrative flourishes to the tale. As recently as 2016, Texarkana native and historian James Presley wrote an accurate, definitive account of the murders wherein he makes a compelling case that the culprit was a man named Youell Swinney, a local criminal who was in fact one of those arrested but eventually set free.

Of course, by this point, the case has long gone cold; what lives on is the terror instilled by such brutal acts occurring against the backdrop of small-town America, and so we continue to keep the story alive while also trying to tame it. Each year, the original *Town That Dreaded Sundown* plays at one

of the parks where a couple was attacked. A 2014 remake/sequel acknowledges both the murders and the original movie but leans harder into the comfortable slasher tropes that keep the real horror at arm's length. It's been three-quarters of a century since The Phantom Killer last struck, but he still stalks our collective subconscious after dark.

BRYAN CHRISTOPHER



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

Larry Zerner, *Friday The 13th Part III's* Shelly

Many an awkward 1980s teen horror nerd who had a hard time talking to girls felt acutely *seen* upon being introduced to the hapless Shelly, played by Larry Zerner, in *Friday the 13th Part III*. Love him or hate him, there's no denying that he embodied the lovelorn outcast gorehound in us all. Zerner brought legitimate pathos to what could have been just another disposable *Friday* victim (incredibly, his death occurs mostly offscreen), but he emerged as one of

the series' most pivotal characters, thanks to a certain hockey mask Shelly brings along on the trip to Higgins Haven. While he continues to pop up in occasional acting roles (even reprising his iconic role in the 2017 video game), Zerner now makes a living as an entertainment lawyer and keeps *Friday* fans advised – pro-bono – on the state of the franchise's ongoing rights lawsuit via his Twitter account, @zernerlaw.

JOE O'BRIEN



NEEDFUL THINGS



1 MADBALLS FOAM HORRORBALL

\$9.99 USD

What do you get when you mix classic Madballs toys with some classic fright flick icons? The horror merch collab we've been waiting for since the '80s, that's what! Measuring four inches and featuring iconic characters from *Aliens*, *Predator*, *Friday the 13th*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, they're as collectible as they are fun.

Kidrobot.com



2 JACK O' LANTERN SUNGLASSES

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They may not reveal your neighbours to be members of a conformist alien race, but shades are more about fashion than function anyway. These rimless sunglasses with cutout jack o' lantern lenses are UV-coated to protect your cool, day or night!

Witchinghourbaby.com

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BBQ season ain't over yet, particularly for those who like their meat still twitching. For these culinary creeps, Fearwerx presents an apron fit for a maniac! Featuring photorealistic art of a murderer's leather apron, including gently used "tools" of the trade (duct tape, chloroform, meathook, etc.), they're one size fits all to suit every member of your cannibal clan.

Fearwerx.com



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\$59 USD

Sweatshirt season, at last! From independent artist Kikillo comes a colourful lightweight sweatshirt with an all-over print of various 8-bit demons, monsters and beasts. Available in sizes from XS to 3XL, Earth-wide and beyond!

Kikilopieces.com



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Trick or treat, smell my feet! The gang's all here — pick from your favourite classic Universal Monsters to keep your toes toasty, your paws pretty, and your flippers fetching! One size fits most; perfect for a pre-Halloween puppet show.

Fright-rags.com





CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES

MY PET BLOB

"Squish it! Squash it! Nothing can stop... My Pet BLOB!"

Falling from the sky like a meteor, what began as a fake toy commercial for fun became a unique collectible for Pennsylvania-based special effects sculptor/monster kid Ryan Hickey. Cast in pillow soft foam from a hand-sculpted mould and packaged in a custom designed retro box, My Pet Blob comes in four colourways (including classic red and "remake pink"). Adopt your own at Blobfest or through the My Monster FX Etsy shop!

INSPIRATION

"I have always loved horror films but especially monster movies. I grew up near the towns where the original *Blob* starring Steve McQueen was filmed, so the 1958 version has always been a favourite of mine. As I got older, I would frequent The Colonial Theater, which is featured in *The Blob*, and always wished that there was more fun monster-related merchandise for great yet obscure creatures like the Blob."

MATERIALS

Soft, expanded foam.

PRICE

\$20

FIND IT

etsy.com/shop/MyMonsterFX

CHRIS HAMMOND



VINTAGE AND CLASSIC

GENERAL MILLS MONSTER CEREALS WACKY WOBBLERS

(Funko, 1999-2003)

Long before the launch of its massively successful line of 3 3/4-inch Pop! vinyl figures, toy and collectibles manufacturer Funko was known for its series of Wacky Wobblers bobbleheads. Among some of the company's earliest offerings were bobblehead figures of General Mills Monster Cereal mascots Count Chocula, Franken Berry, and Boo Berry. The Boo Berry was reportedly only available via mail-order, while the other two were also sold in stores. Later, lesser-known General Mills monster characters Fruit Brute (a werewolf with striped coveralls) and Fruity Yummy Mummy (sporting multicoloured bandages) were added to the line.


All five figures – which stand approximately 7

1/2-inches-tall apiece – come on bases adorned with the characters' names; the Fruit Brute and Fruity Yummy Mummy were sculpted to hold miniature bowls of their own cereal. The toys came packaged in window boxes featuring artwork similar to that on the vintage cereal boxes of the 1970s and '80s. The bobbleheads can be found on eBay, and range from \$30 for the more common Count Chocula and Franken Berry figures, to up to \$200 or more for the much rarer Boo Berry release.

JAMES BURRELL

MORE CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES AT RUE-MORGUE.COM





THIS HALLOWEEN, *RUE MORGUE*
CELEBRATES THE HISTORY, RECENT
REVIVAL, AND ENDURING LEGACY
OF A CANON OF FILMS SET IN RURAL
LANDSCAPES AND STEEPED IN WEIRD
FOLKLORE

TWISTED ROOTS OF FOLK HORROR

BY ANDREA SUBISSATI



SCENIC PASTORAL COUNTRYSIDE. A QUIET RURAL VILLAGE. A PEACEFUL PAGRAN FESTIVAL.

Idyllic settings that may not conjure as much terror as a dark and stormy night or a sprawling Gothic castle, but any horror fan worth their salt knows what malevolence lurks between the corn rows, beyond the maypole, after the harvest... Yes, the evils of the modern age may be more glaring but the old ways harbour just as much menace, only buried within a bright and cheerful bouquet. Folk horror might be steeped in sunshine, but its brew is as bitter as bile, digging into our pre-industrial history and unearthing things both natural and terrible.

For all the luxury and convenience of new technology, a full year under lockdown has made us look back on simpler times through the rose-coloured lenses of nostalgia, and perhaps correspondingly, it's given rise to a spike in interest in a certain cinematic subgenre that focuses its critical gaze on the real and imagined evils of days past. But while the resurgence of interest in folk horror has arguably reached its pinnacle – as exemplified by Kier-La Janisse's new comprehensive documentary *Woodlands Dark and Days Bewitched* – it's been simmering below the surface for a long time, not unlike one of its slumbering elder gods.

More than mere fad, folk horror will survive this moment, as this special edition cover story aims to demonstrate, because there's more to it than Ari Aster and the "cottagecore" aesthetic cropping up in fast fashion. Folk horror has long been notoriously nebulous and difficult to articulate short of a vague wave at the fundamental tropes that appear in the subgenre's foundational trilogy: the shocking paranoia and misogyny of Michael Reeves' *Witchfinder General* (1968), the superstitious satanic panic of Piers Haggard's *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1971), and the horrific pagan ritual of Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* (1973).

Certainly, these films are remembered for the menace with which they infused times and cultures long past, with narratives that simultaneously retconned, reimagined, and romanticized such wide-reaching historical topics as nature worship, witchcraft, satanic panic, and rural folklore. It's a subject so vast that while the many experts consulted in *Woodlands Dark and Days Bewitched* – including the likes of *Prevenge*'s Alice Lowe, *A Ghost Story for Christmas*' Lawrence Gordon Clark, and authors Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, Adam Scovell and Maisha Wester, among many more – are able to distill it rather simply, a thorough examination entailed a whopping three-hour runtime to fully explain its historical significance to horror and the wider cinematic world.

Having premiered at SXSW last year, *Woodlands Dark and Days Bewitched* not only touches upon over 200 films that comprise the subgenre, but provides a thorough look at the socio-historical context that saw it adapt and endure throughout the last five decades with no signs of slowing. From the countercultural pagan movement of the 1960s through to contemporary reflections on colonialism and backwoods horror, folk horror has simultaneously provided a look backward at a past whose violence has ripened to nostalgia

and a speculative look forward into a future that's hurtling precariously along a course toward ever-increasing detachment from nature. And folk horror's relevance continues to unfold: the #metoo movement has contributed to a reappraisal of goddess worship and the divine feminine, making a feminist icon of *The Witch*'s Thomasin, who finds liberation in signing her name in the Devil's book, while the term "witch hunt" has been employed to refer to everything from corrupt presidencies to so-called "cancel culture." Folk horror not only warns us that the old ways weren't necessarily the best ones, it reminds us that the evil we've invented in the form of folklore is truly just a bleak reflection of human nature.

It's only fitting that folk horror would receive the *Rue Morgue* treatment in this year's special anniversary issue. In addition to a standalone release of *Woodlands Dark and Days Bewitched*, this December, *Severin* is also releasing the film as the centrepiece of a massive box set titled *All the Haunts Be Ours: A Compendium of Folk Horror* that contains no less than twenty feature-length folk horror films from every corner of the Earth, each fully loaded with extras (see sidebars for a brief taste), a series of curated international short films, a book with new and archival essays and writings, and an audio disc of *Blood on Satan's Claw*'s Linda Hayden reading Arthur Machen's *The White People* with an original score by Timothy Fife. It's a set that does justice to an oft-misunderstood topic, and we've tapped Janisse as well as other *Woodlands Dark* contributors – filmmaker Robert Eggers and author Andy Paciorek – to further comment on a fascinating theme which appears to be in the midst of yet another rebirth.

How do you define folk horror?

Kier-La Janisse: In the simplest terms I would say it's horror in an isolated or rural environment that deals with older customs or belief systems that have persisted due to this isolation. So this includes films that depict these customs in some way – the use of rootwork, sigils, rituals, healing or protection magic, etc. – but also films about what those customs protect against, which is where you get films that deal with folkloric characters and monsters. But you'll notice at the beginning of the documentary that other than "impressions," I don't offer a definition of folk horror – in earlier cuts, I did. But they were all coming from a similar perspective that really privileged British scholarship and so – especially given the international



LAKE OF THE DEAD

Kåre Bergstrøm, Norway, 1958

Though rarely seen outside Scandinavia, where it's considered a formative classic, *Lake of the Dead* is an early Norwegian horror that offers a haunting mix of dark folklore and ghostly mystery chills. The film opens with a woman (Henny Moan) and a group of her friends taking a long

train ride to the idyllic countryside to visit her brother, who is staying at a remote lakefront cabin. But when they arrive, she can't find any sign of him, and some wonder whether he's been the victim of a local legend. It seems one of the cabin's previous owners, a one-legged man, drowned

his sister and her lover before killing himself in the lake in despair, and now anyone who stays at his former home feels the same compulsion to send themselves to a watery grave.

Fearing the worst, they still hope to uncover clues to what happened to the missing brother, only to find that they're also unable to escape the lake's still and silent lure. Later remade for modern audiences in 2019, the original film is superior in every way; a Euro-folk horror classic that, like many entries in the subgenre, focuses on the irresistible and mysterious power of nature. Initially, the well-educated characters simply disagree about what could have happened to the missing man, but their confident reliance on logical theories and behaviour patterns eventually starts to crumble as unexplainable events – including strange nightmares, sleepwalking trances, and even the appearance of a one-legged bird who taunts them from the cabin's roof – pile up.

Featuring a spooky, uncertain atmosphere, with some genuinely frightening haunting scenes that play out in the shadowy cabin, *Lake of the Dead* is a quiet but affecting horror film that's easy to get caught up in.

PAUL CORUPE



scope of the film – it just felt inappropriate to “define” folk horror with some kind of Olympian authority.

Andy Paciorek: The author and filmmaker Adam Scovell identified several characteristics that may be present in folk horror which he elaborates upon in his 2017 book [Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange](#). These factors, which are now frequently referred to as “Scovell’s Chain” are Landscape, Isolation, Skewed Moral or Religious Beliefs, and A Summoning or Happening. Now it is noteworthy that not all of these elements are to be found in every folk horror film or story but many will be. Also, some of these elements may be found in films that may not be regarded as folk horror. The point of interest there is that ineffable certain “something” – an aesthetic or atmospheric quality that you may not be able to adequately describe but you know it when you see it. An interesting aspect of folk horror, however, is that its aesthetic and ambience may be found in areas that may initially seem far removed from ‘horror’ as such. Folk horror elements may be found in such diverse areas as fashion photography, new nature writing, music, and anthropological studies, for example.

To what do you credit the revival of folk horror in contemporary genre cinema? Is it just a matter of old movies being new again or something greater?

Robert Eggers: All these things come in cycles. I think that witchy, occult stuff was re-emerging in the counterculture and then became pop culture and then got into a situation where movies could be financed; and then once one or two do well, [producers] are looking for more things of the same flavour to hopefully continue to make money! I’m sure there’s a more psychologically nuanced reason for that which has to do with culture and how that’s evolving, but I don’t have those answers.

AP: It is worth remembering that the first big wave of folk horror in the 1960s and ’70s occurred during the childhoods of Generation X or what the writer and broadcaster Bob Fischer has aptly dubbed “The Haunted Generation.” The formative era of that demographic was infused with strange stuff – a multitude of horror and sci-fi films, books and comics, paranormal documentaries and magazines, but also in addition, horrors and fears of the real world. In the UK, in the ’70s and ’80s there were a plethora of Public Information Films terrifying

children with the threats of everything from being mangled by farm machinery, abducted by strangers, electrocution, contracting rabies from mad dogs to being hit by a train or being annihilated in a nuclear war. Nostalgia for that demographic often seems more like trauma therapy rather than bygone reminiscence. It is notable then that, as with the related area of Hauntology, many of the creators of the new wave of folk horror grew up in that era.

KLJ: I don’t think it’s about old movies being new again because there are probably more folk horror films made in the last decade than there were in the 1970s – folk horror was not a term that was used in the ’70s, it was applied retroactively to pull certain movies together based on a commonality that was not deliberate. Whereas since 2010 or so, the term became a part of the vernacular enough that filmmakers set out to make films that could be ‘called’ folk horror. So for many newer audiences and creators I do believe that it’s less about the old films themselves than what they signify and how that is applicable to people’s experiences now. For some reason I missed mentioning [The Blair Witch Project](#) in the doc (I kept making reminders for myself to make sure to include certain films and then I would still forget), but if you look at the woods in that film, the stick figures – other than that final creepy shot at the end of the film, most of the film is just shots of trees. Trees in the daytime, trees at night. And at a certain point that became enough for people. Like what do the trees mean? But often this type of thing – a certain atmosphere or aesthetic involving nature or isolated communities – is enough for them to feel they are communing with the essence of ‘folk horror.’

Robert, what draws you personally to make folk horror movies?

RE: I’m personally interested in exploring who we are and where we’re going by where we came from, and I’m just drawn to the past in general. But religion and mythology and ghost stories and the occult have always spoken to me since I was a kid and remain the things I’m most interested in, and I think they all kind of collide in folk horror. Plus, I’m from rural New England and we invented our own folk horror stories to tell each other as kids about the landscapes and dilapidated farmhouses that we grew up around. And then there were the stories, the old folktales, and history that belong to the region that were all very alive for me as a kid.



IL DEMONIO

Brunello Rondi, Italy, 1963

Best known for his collaborations with Federico Fellini on some of his most enduring masterpieces, screenwriter Brunello Rondi helmed this black-and-white shocker in which a jilted woman turns to witchcraft to achieve her amorous ends and finds herself targeted by the local clergy. Purificata (Daliah Lavi) is a spirited, sexually liberated woman who performs pagan rituals away from the prying eyes of her small, superstitious community in the south of Italy. When her advances are rebuffed by a farmer (Frank Wolff), who chooses to marry a more socially acceptable woman instead, Puri, driven mad by the rejection, puts a curse on his impending nuptials. As a rash of unfortunate incidents start to befall the townsfolk, the villagers are quick to blame her for the bad luck and, believing her only salvation is to claim to be possessed by a demon, she acts out all the tell-tale signs of malefic supernatural influence in a doomed bid to save herself from persecution.



The film boasts an earthy malevolence and a penetrating disdain for organized religion which, naturally, led to it being condemned by the Vatican for "anti-Catholic sentiments." Fans of Lucio Fulci's 1972 folk-giallo [Don't Torture A Duckling](#) will find a spiritual precursor in *Il Demonio*, and viewers will be surprised to see Israeli-born actress Lavi (possibly familiar to fright fans for her role opposite Christopher Lee in Mario Bava's [The Whip and the Body](#) from the same year) perform a deeply unsettling "spider-walk" a decade before Friedkin would shoot a similar sequence for [The Exorcist](#). With its focus on pre-Christian magic and the fear that Puri's austere, insular, violently hypocritical religious community bears towards her wild, unbridled womanhood, *Il Demonio* is a hearty helping of folk horror, Italian style.

ROCCO T. THOMPSON



Occult Classics: Piers Haggard's *The Blood on Satan's Claw* is considered one of the "unholy trinity" of foundational folk horror films, along with Michael Reeves' *Witchfinder General*, and Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man*.

"RELIGION AND MYTHOLOGY AND GHOST STORIES AND THE OCCULT HAVE ALWAYS SPOKEN TO ME SINCE I WAS A KID AND REMAIN THE THINGS I'M MOST INTERESTED IN, AND I THINK THEY ALL KIND OF COLLIDE IN FOLK HORROR."

ROBERT EGGERS (*THE WITCH*, *THE LIGHTHOUSE*)

How do you think folk horror narratives sit in our age of technology? Do they represent an affinity for archaic ideas, a longing for the supernatural, or something else?

KLJ: I do think that folk horror is to a certain extent informed by "future shock" and the pace at which technology is moving and longing to return to something simpler. It can be exhausting trying to stay on top of new developments, new trends, new technology. It can really burn you out. But some of the key British folk horror has an interesting, direct relationship with technology, those written by Nigel Kneale in particular, where he was kind of blending folklore with science fiction. The most obvious example of this is *The Stone Tape*, in which technology is used to try to de-

code memories or imprints that have been "recorded" onto the ancient stone in an old manor house. The music of a lot of '70s televised folk horror was usually electronic music and so for a certain generation that sound became very tied to folk horror, as incongruous as it may seem.

AP: There are other considerations also to mull over as to why a folk horror revival has taken root in these times. Political and social turbulence may indeed play a part as will the spectre of climate change and other environmental crises. A factor of folk horror is frequently the land and people's relationship [with it], sometimes by proxy via the worship of nature gods. In *The Wicker Man* (1973), the whole story revolved around the failure of fruit crops.



VIY

Konstantin Ershov and Georgiy Kropachyov,
Russia, 1967

A Russian masterwork of horror-fantasy with touches of fairy tale-like whimsy, *Viy* is firmly rooted in the folk horror tradition, with devout Christian faith besieged by an ancient, pagan past. The story follows wandering priest-in-training Khoma (Leonid Kuravlyov), who accepts



an offer of lodging at the home of an elderly matron, only to discover that his host is an evil witch. Initially unsure of what to do, he viciously assaults her, and flees back to his monastery in terror after witnessing her turn into a young woman (Natalya Varley). Later, Khoma is asked to spend a few nights in a creaky old church watching over the corpse of a recent murder victim, and is shocked to discover it's the same woman he attacked. Worse than that, she doesn't seem so dead after all – she floats out of her coffin for three successive nights, casting spells in increasingly aggressive attempts to penetrate Khoma's protective chalk circle.

Based on the work of Ukranian novelist Nikolai Gogol, *Viy* draws on Russia's dark history, but it's surprisingly modern in its approach, subjecting Khoma to a series of colourful cinematic nightmares that seem indebted to Mario Bava. Each night, the witch calls forth more demonic monsters and winged nightmares to put Khoma's faith to the full test – including the Viy, the fearsome and misshapen gnome king. Viy and his minions are just a few of the film's practical FX triumphs from Aleksandr Ptushko, an early Russian stop-motion and animation pioneer who pulls out all the stops in creating a teeming mass of notorious mythical beasts that emerge from the church's decaying walls and floorboards to drive Khoma to the brink of insanity. And while the bumbling Khoma is somewhat sympathetic in his terrifying predicament, as the witch's killer, he deserves all the cosmic retribution that's coming to him.

PAUL CORUPE



Murder Maleficarum: Anxieties about witchcraft and Satanism abound in folk horror, as seen in 1970's *Witchhammer*.

“IT IS NO SURPRISE THAT ARTISTS WILL TURN TO HORROR AS A MODE OF EXPRESSION IN THESE TIMES AND SYMBOLICALLY FOLK HORROR MAY BE A TIMELY REFLECTION OF THAT.”

ANDY PACIOREK (FOLK HORROR REVIVAL BOOK SERIES)

Now in the 21st century we are contending with the real-life horrors of the extinction of pollinators and numerous other life forms, pollution, habitat loss, and the effects of climatic changes. Furthermore, we live in a time where political division, the pandemic, and other world events have resulted in a viral spread of paranoia and conspiracy theory. With this cult hive-mind writhing in the background of a world in turmoil it is no surprise that artists will turn to horror as a mode of expression in these times and symbolically folk horror may be a timely reflection of that.

Paganism has historically been viewed in two ways: as a terrifying and demonic cult, or as an Earth-positive celebration of nature. Where do folk horror narratives fall into this discussion?

KLJ: It really depends who is making the film and where it comes from. In most colonial cultures, like England, America, and Australia, there is a fascination with the old ways but they are often depicted as the source of the horror. Whereas in many non-white cultures in particular, the old belief systems are a source of empowerment that protect against the thing that is causing the horror. In a lot of British and American folk horror, the fear isn't of some creature in the woods – it's a fear of those people who believe in the creature in the woods. It's a fear of irrational belief. And that's why cult narratives are so key to a

lot of folk horror. It's also why I think in our current climate of dangerous political division that this “horror of belief” is resonating so much.

AP: For the purpose of telling a horror story, it is more dramatic to portray a religious group as a malevolent force, which may not always be an accurate representation of the real-world scenario. It is worth considering though that the Pagan element are not always cast as the bad guys. If we look at *Witchfinder General* (1968), *Witchhammer* (1970), or even at the more recent and more urban film *Red State* (2011), it is Christianity which is cast in the bad light. *The Wicker Man* is an interesting one to look at – there is such an ambivalence in that film. It is easy to perhaps dislike the character Sergeant Howie as he is judgemental, gruff, ill-tempered and sanctimonious but he is there on serious business and genuinely cares about finding a missing child. In contrast, though the islanders are more liberal and laid-back in their beliefs and practices, there is a darkness to their faith. But both they and Howie believe that their stance and actions are proper and correct. Neither camp would consider themselves evil.

The Devil is a complicated figure in folk horror, given that he represents a force of primal evil as well as the very human qualities of sensuality and carnality. Ul-

COMPOSER TIMOTHY FIFE STRAYS FROM HIS
CONVENTIONAL SCHLOCK SOUNDTRACKS TO SCORE AN
AUDIO CD OF ARTHUR MACHEN'S SEMINAL FOLK HORROR
STORY "THE WHITE PEOPLE"

MUSIC FOR A WEIRD TALE

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

AMIDST ALL THE CINEMATIC GOOD-
NESS OF THE ALL THE HAUNTS BE
OURS BOX SET, Severin Films is including an extra au-
ral treat: a CD containing a reading of Arthur Machen's 1904 occult short
story "The White People" by *Blood on Satan's Claw* actress Linda Hayden.
Backing her spoken words is an appropriately old-fashioned, folkloric orig-
inal score by [Timothy Fife](#) — who seems on the surface to be an unusual
choice, given his background.

Fife has previously specialized in "weird electronica" on albums like
Black Carbon for Death Waltz Originals and (with Repeated Viewing) *Para-
normal Sounds of the Synthesizer* for Burning Witches Records. His pre-
vious composing credits include independent shockfests such as Richard
Griffin's *Frankenstein's Hungry Dead* and *Murder University* and *Herschell
Gordon Lewis' BloodMania*. This change of pace into more lyrical territory
has its roots in a project Fife first pitched to Kier-La Janisse at the 2018
Boston Underground Film Festival.

"I talked to Kier-La about doing a spoken word of a book she might
want to read, and that I would score," he recalls. "I had heard a bunch
of her commentaries, and she's got a great voice and knows how to tell
a narrative very well. She saw me perform at the festival, so she knew
what I could do and was very open to the idea. So we recorded an entire
album that still has not been released [Fife declines to reveal the book in
question], but she really liked the process and enjoyed collaborating with
me, and asked me to score 'The White People.'"

Machen's tale opens with a debate between two men about the nature
and definition of sin, before one gives the other a Green Book to read. The
contents of that volume make up the bulk of the story, telling of a girl who
becomes fascinated with black-magic lore and is drawn into the world of

the occult by her nurse. Its centuries-old atmospheres required a particu-
lar kind of music, as Fife explains.

"Kier-La wanted the score to be very specific to the time period when
the story was written, which was quite a challenge for me, because I don't
normally work with traditional instruments at all, and she was very much
against using any electronics," he says. "I enlisted the help of my friend
Renato Montenegro, who's a guitarist in a band called Dust Witch, and he
played all the guitar tracks for 'The White People.' Then I used a lot of sam-
pled instruments — very well-sampled instruments — to give it an authentic
feel, a sound that was potentially from that time period."

Fife also took influences from great folk-horror movie music of the past.
"I went back and listened to *The Wicker Man* and *The Blood on Satan's
Claw* — a bunch of the big names," he says. "I also looked at some British
horror films that came out around the same time that weren't necessarily
folk horror, but had a similar kind of sound. And then I listened to a lot
of Czech music, [the film] *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, and things
like that, that I felt had elements I could bring in to make this unique and
different."

Throughout it all, Fife worked closely with Janisse to shape the score
and marry it with Machen and Hayden's words.

"It was quite an undertaking," he says, "because it came out to be about
an hour and 40 minutes long. There was a lot of preparation that had to go
into that, and that's why I actually wrote some of the tracks in advance. I
composed about five or six pieces that I was able to give to Renato, and
that were going to recur throughout the score. Then we were able to put
them into the piece as a whole later on. This is certainly the longest thing
I've ever worked on." 🍀

EYES OF FIRE

Avery Crounse, USA, 1983

While most well-loved folk horror films draw from European or Asian mythology, North America has its own distinctive tradition in the subgenre. One of the more notable American folk horror efforts, *Eyes of Fire* is an eccentric 18th-century pastoral tale of witchcraft, interventionism, and the deep forces of nature. Things get going when a disgraced minister (Dennis Lipscomb) and a teenage mystic (Karlene Crockett) are cast out from their village along with a hardscrabble band of followers. Attacked by Indigenous groups in the area, they seek safety in a dark woodland valley believed to be ruled by evil spirits. Undeterred, they decide to settle in some abandoned cabins in the area, only to face a true test concocted by a demonic witch who refuses to welcome the interlopers to her land and home.



As with the best folk horror entries, *Eyes of Fire* is almost reverential in its depiction of nature as an unforgiving and almighty energy, but it's cleverly used here as a critique of colonialism in the days before America was officially founded. Despite director Avery Crounse's steady focus on the untamed environment, the dangers faced by the settlers become more tangled and pronounced as they step deeper into the witch's domain, until everything turns into a surreal melting nightmare of video effects – trees grow faces, bones rain down from the sky, and strange figures arise from the muck and leaves. Though lacking the subtlety of some of folk horror's other works, *Eyes of Fire* commits to its ideas with an abandon that helped spark a cult following, despite initial bad reviews. If you like to drink from the cauldron of *The Witch* (2015), you'll be pleasantly surprised that *Eyes of Fire* bubbles up some equally tasty brew.

PAUL CORUPE



timately, what do you think folk horror explores about the nature of evil?

KLJ: I think folk horror explores an ambiguity about good and evil – questioning whether the “old ways” were better or worse, and the often violent means of progress – and presents friction between [these] perspectives, which is how these films are most valuable. So many times how the Devil is presented – as an alternately controlling or liberating force – will depend on what perspective the filmmakers are coming from. Like many horror tropes, I think sometimes the Devil is used as an evil figure solely because it's familiar shorthand for a lot of audiences.

AP: In *Witchfinder General*, there is the undercurrent that some of the people who see those accused of practicing witchcraft put to death, truly believe that this is a necessary and godly act in dealing with a threat within their community that they perceive to be real, but the characterization of the prominent roles of Hopkins and Stearne reveal that their motives for employing torture and death are avaricious in their pursuit of handsome payment and also sexually sadistic. These evils need no Devil to exist as they are a common characteristic of some people in their own right, unfortunately.

How important is it that the roots of folk horror cinema lie in Britain and how much of its British roots are part of its ongoing development?

KLJ: It's interesting because I think pop-culturally, in terms of what literature and films genre fans know, it seems to have British roots. But last year I was preparing a folk horror panel and the scholar Kinitra Brooks was on it, and when I posed a similar question, she argued that folk horror did not have British roots for her, and that she was actually unaware of most British folk horror. In her experience, folk horror had African roots and could be seen in the anthropological work of Zora Neale Hurston who had collected songs and stories in the Caribbean and the American South in the '20s and '30s. And that was interesting because it was a completely different perspective, a completely different approach, and I thought about that a lot as I was finishing the film – how biased so much of our knowledge is, based on what's gotten the most ink in the books and magazines we read. I think the British films and authors will always be important because they are very common points of reference for people. But how much they

dominate the conversation going forward will depend on how open people are to other perspectives and considering other kinds of films and literature that could count as folk horror.

AP: Folk horror sees no borders and belongs to all people, creeds, and cultures in some form. Even cinematically I'd say the first full-length folk horror movie is the 1922 Danish-Swedish film *Häxan*. Other countries were releasing films in the era that can now be regarded as the first real big wave of folk horror in the 1960s and '70s. For instance, Italy had released *Black Sunday* (1960), *Il Demonio* (1963), and *Don't Torture a Duckling* (1972); Czechoslovakia released *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* and *Witchhammer* (both 1970); the West Germans had *Mark of the Devil* (1970); and the USA had *Crowhaven Farm* (1970). Much of Japan's horror films of the era such as *Kwaidan* (1964), *Onibaba* (1964), and *Kuroneko* (1968) have a folk horror sensibility. As do some of the movies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union such as Finland's *The White Reindeer* (1952) and Russia's *Morozko* (1964) and *Viy* (1967). Internationally there are numerous other examples to be found.

How does Western folk horror compare to other international folk horror?

RE: Western as in North American, or Western as in white European? Because those are different things. I think that because white Europeans were pagans, in Europe, there is a different psychological energy: that's how you have all this folk horror about landscapes and stone circles that have to do with this pagan past, whereas when the Europeans came to North America they were [largely] Christian, so that makes it kind of a different thing.

Let's say North America, for argument's sake. What's unique about it?

RE: I would say that in my exploration of New England folk horror in *The Witch*, it was interesting because I was getting into a lot of British folklore that had been very much alive in the minds of these Puritan settlers that didn't stick [when they came to America]. The hare in *The Witch* [for example]; I have a Scottish friend who would be like, “Oh, I saw three hares and wondered what those witches were doing crossing my lawn.” That's a normal attitude to have over in the UK but we don't have hares in North America, so it's not a surprise that that thread disappeared. So it was interesting to re-engage with these

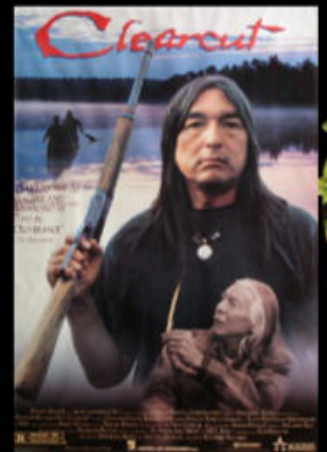


CLEARCUT

Ryszard Bugajski, Canada, 1991

Taking its title from the practice of levelling large swaths of forest for industrial processing, this production by Polish director Ryszard Bugajski channels the enduring collective rage of Canada's First Nations peoples into an all-out assault against colonial capitalism and the destruction of ancestral lands. Having just lost his case to disrupt a callous logging operation, Lawyer Peter Maguire (Ron Lea) arrives by seaplane in an attempt to diffuse the increasingly fraught situation between the First Nation protesters and the company encroaching on their homeland. He's soon introduced to Arthur (Graham Greene), a militant Indigenous activist who pulls him into a plot to kidnap the logging company's manager – to either show him the error of his ways, or extract violent recompense for the centuries of cruelty inflicted upon his forebears. Moored by Academy Award-nominated Oneida actor Greene, *Clearcut* never achieved mainstream success, which some attribute to its uneasy echoes of the real-life Kanasket Resistance – a conflict that occurred between a group of Mohawk people and the Canadian government that resulted in two deaths just a year prior to the film's debut. Nonetheless, it remains a touchstone for its empathetic portrayals of Indigenous peoples and has been praised for the way in which it created space for Native actors to "act out their colonially-induced angst" without judgement or moralizing. Though its oblique supernatural elements and thematic concerns put it definitively in the folk horror subgenre, *Clearcut* plays like a rape-revenge movie in which the inciting incident is the defilement of Mother Earth herself.

ROCCO T. THOMPSON



Freaks Of Nature: From the Gothic to the whimsical, folk horror's far-reaching tendrils have spanned decades and cultures. (From top): Italy's **Black Sunday** (1960), and Czechoslovakia's **Valerie and Her Week of Wonders** (1970).

things that were kind of lost but are kicking around in the collective unconscious of North Americans. Because certainly in New England, there is still this Anglo British past, so [it was a matter of] trying to find those connections to that and see if they might resonate again.

AP: As with folklore which has also seen somewhat of a recent resurgence of interest alongside folk horror, we can see something which suggests Professor Joseph Campbell's "Masks of God" studies. There are many similarities to be found within different examples of world folk horror such as fear of the supernatural or the "other," archetypes such as witches, ritual, custom, and the relationship to nature and the environment. Such universal features, however, are presented wearing and pertaining to the particular cultural masks and the geographic features of the area where the narrative unfolds. For instance, whilst customs such as dancing around a maypole may make total sense in the British film *The Wicker Man*, it would be alien and nonsensical in a film set in the South Pacific or somewhere else with entirely dif-

ferent customs. Likewise Australian films such as *Walkabout* (1971), *Wake in Fright* (1971), and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) can use the harsh uniqueness and vast range of the Australian Outback and bush as a strong character in its own right. You could not reflect the same effect as such in a balmy meadow. Also, historical events can provide a unique inspiration. The Canadian film *Black Robe* (1991), though not a traditional horror film as such, does not fall far from the look, feel, and character of a folk horror film in its telling of the fate of a Jesuit mission amongst the First Nation people in the 17th-century. Likewise, the American documentary *Wisconsin Death Trip* (1999) as well as Michael Lesy's 1973 book upon which it is based, would amongst its collection of true tales correlate to the links found in Scovell's folk horror chain. Another historical aspect that may influence the folk horror to be found in particular nations is that of colonialism. The nature of the narrative there may change according to whether its teller belongs to the land that was colonised or the one that did the colonising. Generally, however, whilst on the surface the folk horror of

BEFORE STOKER, LE FANU, OR EVEN POLIDORI, THE VAMPIRE LOOMED LARGE IN SERBIAN FOLKLORE – A FACT BEST REFLECTED IN DJORDJE KADIJEVIĆ'S **THE SHE-BUTTERFLY**, APPEARING FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER ON SEVERIN'S FOLK HORROR BOX SET

BIRTH OF THE VAMPIRE

BY DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

THE PHRASE "FOLK HORROR" USUALLY ELICITS ASSOCIATIONS TO THE WESTERN PAGAN TRADITION

involving nature and fertility worship, witches, diablery, sabbaths, isolated communities and, perhaps, giant wicker-men. That's all fine and true but, as the documentary *Woodlands Dark and Days Bewitched* proves, there's a whole world of possibilities under that umbrella, just as there is a whole wide world of folk beliefs other than those usually covered in British and American horror films.

Take, for example, the vampire. These bloodsucking creatures, whether living, dead or undead, exist all over the globe: Japan, Africa, Brazil, Philippines, you name it, they're everywhere, in one of their thousand guises. But the Western vampire myth and iconography are based on three, "The Vampyre" by John W. Polidori (1819), the novella "Carmilla" by J. Sheridan Le Fanu (1872), and the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker (1897), plus two key cinematic adaptations: *Nosferatu* by F.W. Murnau (1922) and *Dracula* by Tod Browning (1931). Because of this, the word "vampire" will seemingly always lead people to think of these works or their later variations – all of them appropriated and adapted beyond recognition from what was originally a Slavic folk concept.

With the exception of those deeply steeped in vampire lore, it is not so widely known that the Western world got the word "vampire" and its basic attributes from Serbia, of all places, in the early 18th century.

Vienna daily papers published a report in 1725 dealing with an alleged vampire epidemic in a Serbian village, Kisiljevo, where a certain Petar Blagojević apparently refused to stay dead, and attacked his wife and neighbours night after night, spreading contagion and death. Nine people died suddenly, all of them claiming on their death beds that Blagojević had assaulted them. Austrian officials were sent for exhumations and autopsies, which discovered Blagojević's body unnaturally well preserved. When the villagers pierced it with the hawthorn stake, blood flowed from the ten weeks old corpse. They burnt it and thus ended the vampire plague, but the world got a new word in its vocabulary.

Reports of this case curdled the blood of Austrian readers. The fascination was solidified after a similar case, in another Serbian village, in 1731. A person known as Arnaut Pavle, although dead, bothered his villagers in Medvedja. After another round of excavations, where the suspicious bodies were beheaded and burnt, an official report by an Austrian doctor, Flückinger, titled *Visum et repertum* (1732), was soon translated into French and English, and created a stir throughout Europe. A curious mixture of sensationalism and academia was born, with dissertations being written and bearing titillating titles such as *De Masticatione Mortuorum*

in Tumulis (1728), *Dissertatio de Uampyris Seruiensibus* (1733), and *Dissertatio de Cadaueribus Sanguisugis* (1732). The most influential of these was Dom Augustin Calmet's *Dissertations sur les Apparitions des Anges, des Démons et des Esprits et sur les revenants et vampires de Hongrie, de*



Bohême, de Moravie, e de Silésie (1740).

The vampire made its way into literature, thanks to Romantic poets like Goethe, Byron, Coleridge, Keats, Gautier, and Byron's personal physician, Polidori, whose "The Vampyre" established the notion of a blue-blooded seducer and bloodsucker (clearly inspired by Byron himself). But back in Serbia, as in the rest of Eastern Europe, vampires were neither counts nor barons; they had no castles and no desire to invade the (Western) world: they remained simple peasants, while their victims were not strangers but immediate family and neighbours.

The first Serbian dictionary of vernacular language (1818) defines the creature thus: "Vampire is a man into whom (in accordance with folk tales) some sort of an evil spirit enters and revives him (turns him into a vampire) 40 days after his death. After that, the vampire rises from his grave in the night and suffocates people in their homes, drinking their blood." Many other details are mentioned which one rarely finds in the Western lore; for example, that vampires are mostly seen during the winter, or that a spotless black colt would stop over the graves where the suspected vampire may be. One of the curious details is that the Serbian vampire is not pale, but quite the opposite: it is usually found in the grave fattened, bloated, and red with human blood. He walks with his shroud over the shoulder – likely the root of the Western vampire's cape. There is a whole lore about a vampire coming back to his wife and begetting a child with her, which has no bones. Sometimes a child born of a vampire is the most effective vampire hunter. Clearly, in Serbia everything is settled within the family (remember [A Serbian Film](#)?). No need to invite heavily accented buffoons from Amsterdam.

It is a great pity that Serbs never fully exploited their famous asset in literature or cinema. Thus far, the most well-known Serbian vampire in cinema is the one played by Boris Karloff in Mario Bava's *Black Sabbath* (1963): its longest episode was based on A.K. Tolstoy's Serbia-based story "The Family of the Vourdalak" (1839). As for Serbian vampire cinema, it is pretty scarce: one cheap and cheesy horror comedy, *Vampires Are Among Us* (1989), and one misguided satire, *Fool Moon Over Belgrade* (1993), barely deserve a footnote. However, the first attempt to do this creature justice was by far the most successful: Djordje Kadijević's *Leptirica* (*The She-Butterfly*, 1973), although made for TV, is a real gem. Luckily, thanks to Severin, the film is now available as part of their release of the *Woodlands Dark* doc, featured on an extra disc, together with two other dark, gloomy, Gothic films by the same director, from the same year (*The Maidenly Music* and *The Inmate*).

The She-Butterfly is set in a small Serbian 19th-century village, where a vampire is attacking unfortunate millers in a desolate mill, spill-



Bloodsuckers Of Belgrade: Serbia's first horror movie, Djordje Kadijević's *Leptirica* (*The She-Butterfly*, 1973), draws heavily from pre-Stoker, European vampire myth.

ing their blood onto pristine white flour. A young man decides to spend a night in the mill, hoping to prove worthy of the hand of a beautiful girl whose tutor is against their love. The vampire, as seen in this film, is far more animalistic than your usual Western counts: hairy, with big teeth and claws, fast and vicious and unpredictable. *The She-Butterfly* is firmly rooted in traditional Serbian vampire lore, but its mixture of humour, romance, dark eroticism, and scares is pretty unique and different from any other Hammer or Hollywood vampire film you've ever seen.

This should be no wonder since it was directed by Djordje Kadijević, art historian and author of several highly respected non-genre dramas and TV series. International horror fans were able to see his *A Holy Place* (1990), adapted from Gogol's story "Viy" and recently made available with English subtitles and an accompanying essay by yours truly on Eureka's special edition Blu-ray of the Russian *Viy* (1967, see p.16). *A Holy Place* also offers valuable insight into Slavic folklore, this time dealing with witches and rev-

enants, and is more sinister and terrifying than the better known Russian fairy-tale version. As such, it is further proof that folk horror can offer much, much more than motifs and creatures from Latin, Germanic, Nordic, and Anglo-Saxon cultural spheres.

Looking back and rediscovering hidden gems from lesser known traditions is always a worthwhile pastime, but the Serbian vampire is not (only) a thing of the past. A new one is lurking behind the corner: *Vampir*, written and directed by Branko Tomović, who also stars, is on the Cannes film market as of this writing, looking for a release later this year. It deals with a Londoner of Serbian origin who comes to a Serbian village to keep watch over a cemetery, but encounters strange people and, one expects, stranger creatures. The man's name, Arnaut, comes from the originator of the second famous Serbian vampire epidemic, the one from 1731, and the whole thing should represent a return to the roots of the vampire's family tree. Its success remains to be seen... soon. 🧛

different countries may superficially be different, dig deeper and you may find underneath that it is built upon very similar fears and thoughts.

KLJ: One thing I noticed making the film was that British, American, Australian, and Brazilian folk horror had some commonalities, in that the horror tended to demonize old beliefs, which were seen as separate from the protagonist's perspective. This is something very tied to colonial culture – Brazil was colonized and involved in the slave trade like the US, so they have similar anxieties in their horror about the belief systems of both the Indigenous populations and the imported African populations. In the UK this fear is the old pagan beliefs – although there are areas of the country where remnants of these beliefs are still practiced, like in the Southwest of the UK, with the Oss Oss Wee Oss in Padstow, etc., so there is still cultural familiarity with a lot of these customs, and even a pride about them, but in their horror films, the people who still believe these things are depicted as backwards and dangerously irrational. Whereas, as Dejan Ognjanović says in the documentary, with Eastern European folk horror – and I think it's similar for Asian folk horror – these older belief systems are still dominant. So the films don't have the same sense of outside/inside, city versus country – the horror is usually happening within the confines of a specific belief system, and the characters already believe in these things, there isn't an opposing belief system. This is an oversimplification, but it was something I noticed.

Kier-La, is folk horror essentially feminist in your view?

KLJ: I don't think it is inherently feminist, but I think there are possibilities in folk horror for any marginalized culture and that includes women. Obviously the predominance of witch narratives in folk horror does give a strong slant towards women's stories and issues.

We are living in an age of occulture – teenage witches, satanic fashion, and game store oracles. What do folk horror narratives have to offer the times?

KLJ: Well, I think the occult is a standard thoroughfare for teenagers – I gorged on spellbooks as a teen and there are still certain little things I do that I picked up from those books, but I also attribute that to the fact that I have no sense of a god and so I grasp for things to believe in, so I have adopted a lot of superstitions. I mean, I don't believe you can cure epilepsy by tying a chicken to your foot, but certain granny wisdom I adhere to. That said, I think we are seeing a particular resurgence in the mainstreaming of the occult because we're going through a period of disillusionment and cynicism, where there is intense division, not just in the US



Pagan Rites: Ben Wheatley's slow-burn psychological horror *Kill List* (2011) contributed to the recent revival of British folk horror.

where it is very pronounced, but in the UK and Europe with Brexit, and we're going through a very tangible environmental crisis, and for the last year we've had a global pandemic – all of this has been brewing since before COVID but, if anyone had curiosity about alternative forms of belief before COVID, the pandemic has certainly given them room to explore it, but also has caused them to need it, to need additional forms of support.

AP: What is noticeable is that the revival of folk horror has come in tandem with a growing interest in folklore. That's really good, that from horror fiction people may learn more about their historical culture and that of other cultures. It will hopefully get people to appreciate other cultures more as the folk horror revival is spearheaded by creatives who believe that folk horror belongs to everyone, not the few. Also it is curious to see how a horror subgenre or thematic mode can have an actual relationship with people's personal spirituality. Folk horror revivalists may belong to any faith or none, and that is a very good thing; one of the events that myself and Darren Charles were invited to be keynote speakers at was a Pagan Federation Conference (which was a very interesting fun day) but essentially it is a faith gathering, and so it was interesting to see how a talk on this form of horror went down so well. I don't know but I doubt that a discussion about flesh-eating zombies or alien invaders may have sat so comfortably at a spiritual get-together.

RE: I think that the best stories are archetypal, and can be read in many ways and retold many times and be reinterpreted over and over again in every epoch. So I think that the folk horror stories that will last are the ones that are like that. I think

that some of the M.R. James stuff today really works, and some of it is so constricted by his Victorian attitudes... I enjoy it but I don't know if it speaks to everyone or speaks to society today but the simplest forms do.

What is the future of folk horror?

KLJ: I think like many realms or subgenres of horror it's about seeing what it looks like from different perspectives – perspectives that aren't shaped by Western pop culture, that aren't informed by lists of what we consider to be "canonical" films and texts.

AP: I hope to see it evolve along original and diverse routes. More films made by different nations relating to their own local forms of folk horror would be interesting to see. But also looking at how to present more familiar folk horror themes in different ways. One of the earliest films to come out in the current wave of 21st-century folk horror was 2011's *Kill List*. In that movie, folk horror was blended with gritty crime and kitchen-sink drama – a weird mix that totally worked. *The Witch* went back to traditional roots but marked its own distinct stamp upon it. The Estonian film *November* (2017) again was something different. There is no good reason to simply make more and more films using the Robin Redbreast/*The Wicker Man* blueprint. It does not matter how pretty you make the film's cinematography or if you add bees or bears

or whatever into the mix, there is no need to tread the same familiar path over and over. Its influence on music, literature, and the avenues it opens up to academic talks I think will endure too, but again thinking outside the box, allowing a fluid freedom to evolve and a respectful openness to diverse cultures will be important to folk horror's future. 🐝



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THIRTY THRILLING THREEQUELS!

Reviews by Bryan Christopher, Ryan Coleman, Paul Corupe, Jose Cruz, Grace Detwiler, Kevin Hoover, Alison Lang, Dejan Ognjanović, Patti Pauley, Stacie Ponder, Rocco T. Thompson, and Owen Williams.

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 3: DREAM WARRIORS (1987)

A return to a horror franchise scripted by its creator that slaps as hard as the original? For that, this threequel is something of an anomaly. Framed in a narrative straight from a YA fantasy, propped up with inventive kills, and splashed liberally with Robert Englund's creepy charisma (before the series drowned in it), *Elm Street 3* is a fan dream come true. The fact that it links itself to the original film, expands upon the cinematic Kruegerverse, and manages to provide a satisfying "end" to everyone's favourite dream demon keeps it fresh in our nightmares 30 years later. **JC**

ALIEN 3: ASSEMBLY CUT (1992)

The result of a legendarily troubled production, director David Fincher disowns the version of *Alien 3* that hit screens in 1992, but this assembly cut seeks to reconfigure the movie into something more closely resembling his original vision. In doing so, it uncovers an uncompromisingly grim and dystopian cautionary tale — a world of marginalized people controlled by religious fanatics in a ruthless industrialized hellscape. In many ways, the *Assembly Cut* is as convincing an argument for prison abolition as anything else in 2021, and it's a fascinating early glimpse into the mind of a visionary filmmaker. **AL**

ANNABELLE COMES HOME (2019)

To know Annabelle is to love Annabelle. Has there been an American sweetheart as universally adored since Julia Roberts? The world first laid eyes on the pigtailed demonic conduit in 2013 in a brief, sequel-bait capsule sequence in James Wan's *The Conjuring*. Since then, Annabelle has single-handedly brought haunted dolls back to the horror imagination with three bespoke spinoffs; the most delicious of which is this Gary Dauberman written/directed threequel. *Annabelle Comes Home* is peak slumber party cinema — bursting with '70s aesthetics, supernatural baddies, possessed toys, and the power of adolescent female friendship. **RC**

ARMY OF DARKNESS (1992)

Trading splatstick for slapstick and transforming Bruce Campbell into a bona fide cult icon in the process, Sam Raimi capped his *Evil Dead* trilogy with this fan favourite that was originally titled *Medieval Dead*. The comedy that was a mordant undertone of the first film and a groovy rhythm in the second gets turned up to eleven for an all-out sonic blast of Stogie-like



antics, Tex Avery-style action, and unforgettable one-liners. Though the gore is tamer, Raimi makes up for it in cinematic showmanship with a camera that never stops jiving, Deadite battles that never stop bopping, and a leading man with a chin that won't quit. **JC**

BEYOND RE-ANIMATOR (2003)

The *Re-Animator* series fizzled after two installments, but briefly flickered back to life in 2003, giving us another joyous 90 minutes in the company of Jeffrey Combs' Herbert West. Imprisoned for a murder committed by one of his reanimated, West continues to experiment with his glowing green reagent, and discovers a "nanoplasmic energy" that leads to some incredible body-swapping antics and a severed penis fighting a rat. Sadly, *Beyond* didn't lead to the proposed *House of Re-Animator*, which would have found the mad doctor in the White House giving new life to a moribund POTUS. Dare you imagine? **OW**

BLOODLUST: SUBSPECIES III (1994)

A hidden gem of the 1990s video boom, the *Subspecies* series is the magnum opus of Ted Nicolaou, a director best known for his work with Full Moon Features. Having been pursued across Bucharest by the bloodsucking Radu, freshly vampified American tourist Michelle succumbs to her sire's influence as her sister tries to wrest her from his clammy, long-fingered grasp. Simplistic to a fault, the *Subspecies* films remain cult favorites thanks to their heavy-on-atmosphere Romanian locale and leading man Anders Hove, whose drooling, soft-spoken, parasitic villain

is among the most effectively frightening vampires to hit any screen, big or small. **RTT**

CHILDREN OF THE CORN III: URBAN HARVEST (1995)

Look out Chicago, a creepy new child preacher has just arrived from Nebraska and he's here to convert your children to his evil corn cause! Come to James D.R. Hickox's direct-to-video sequel for the dubious science and stay for the



well-intentioned (if clunky) mid-'90s racial politics, off-the-rails denouement (complete with dolls and stop-motion monsters), a suitcase full of whispering cobs, and future Oscar winner Charlize Theron in her first role as a true corn believer. *Children of the Corn III: Urban Harvest* is He Who Walks Behind the Rows in the City, and it's pure, unadulterated, bonkers delight. **SP**

CHILD'S PLAY 3 (1991)

Chucky's signature dark humour takes the wheel of the franchise in this second sequel to Tom Holland's *Child's Play*. The killer doll is back, fresh out of the rebooted PlayPals factory and off to military school where his old friend 'til the end, a now-teenaged Andy, is barely holding up. When the talking terror runs into a young, easily manipulated cadet named Tyler, all hell breaks loose. Chucky gleefully slashes his way through the military academy, paintball war games, and, in the climax, a haunted carnival ride that sets up his iconic stitched-together look for later sequels. **PP**

DAY OF THE DEAD (1985)

This third "Dead" film is the late George A. Romero's most explicitly political and explicitly gory. After skewering small-town Americana in *Night* and consumerism in *Dawn*, this bitter, misanthropic satire blasts militarism, male chauvinism, racism, and egotism. The human survivors quarrel more than ever, underlining the director's point from previous films that the breakdown in communication between people is a more likely cause of the apocalypse than the shambling, rotten undead. The pinnacle of Romero's zombie films, *Day of the Dead* has guts to spare, thanks to its bold messaging and special makeup effects phenom, Tom Savini, at the top of his game. **DO**

BASKET CASE 3: THE PROGENY (1991)

In the early '90s, Frank Henenlotter's most popular creation – that murderous lump of flesh with an affinity for woven wicker known as Belial – returned to the screen twice in sequels of escalating lunacy, with *The Progeny* standing as the one of the director's least successful yet most demented works. Picking up directly at the cliffhanger ending of *Basket Case 2*, Belial is gearing up to be a new daddy, while his formerly conjoined brother Duane recovers from a breakdown. When some small-town police kidnap his misshapen brood immediately after birth, Belial and his entire chosen family of misfits set out to get the little buggers back. With gross-out gags, gratuitous alliteration, an array of dazzling grotesques (handcrafted by mad genius Gabe Bartalos), and a musical number that would reduce Billy Wilder to confused gibbering, the final *Basket Case* film adds a sense of bizarre whimsy to Henenlotter's unique brand of body horror. **RTT**



Bloodlust: Subspecies III

Children of the Corn III: Urban Harvest

THE EXORCIST III (1990)

Set fifteen years after the events of William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* and inspired by the crimes of the real-life Zodiac Killer, *The Exorcist III* finds author William Peter Blatty adapting his 1983 novel *Legion* with high style. Starring George C. Scott and Brad Dourif in all-time-great performances, *III*, ahem, doubles as a supernatural horror film and detective procedural that has aged elegantly into cult favourite status. Posing the same questions about faith as the original film, the movie triples down on the scares with moments of visual horror that outpace anything from the '73 blockbuster. **GD**

FINAL DESTINATION 3 (2006)

First bereft of Devon Sawa, then Ali Larter, where was the *Final Destination* franchise to go? Straight to the door of then-rising scream queen (come back to horror – we miss you!), Mary Elizabeth Winstead. After the paranoid, pre-9/11 anxiety of the first film and the early aughts all-blue-filter-everything heaviness of the second, James Wong breathed new life into the series by injecting *Final Destination 3* with a self-aware sense of frivolity. The roller-coaster crash, tanning bed trap, and subway finale instantaneously became some of the genre's most iconic scenes and set a new bar for the fan favourite franchise. **RC**

THE GHOST GALLEON (1974)

Spanish director Amando de Ossorio's well-loved *Blind Dead* series hit the high seas for this third entry, featuring everyone's favourite undead, blood-

thirsty Templar Knights. In the film, a rescue party on a creaky ghost ship uncovers a stash of pirate treasure, triggering the protective instincts of the zombie-like creatures sleeping below deck. While the Knights don't make great sailors – they don't have much sense of direction and their sea shanties are too liturgical – *The Ghost Galleon*'s foggy, eerily lit maritime atmosphere puts some wind back in the sails of the venerable Euro-horror franchise. **PC**

HALLOWEEN III: SEASON OF THE WITCH (1982)

With a diegetic jingle that's sure to infect your psyche for decades, the self-referential *Season*

of the *Witch* morphs the Michael Myers-centric *Halloween* franchise into something more like an anthology series by introducing a brand new threat. In Tommy Lee Wallace's threequel, Tom Atkins and Stacey Nelkin attempt to uncover the sinister plot behind mask manufacturer Silver Shamrock Novelties, which threatens the souls of children nationwide via an ancient druidic curse. Having undergone a fan reevaluation since its release, the film ultimately succeeds due to a reach for originality not often attempted in multi-sequel horror franchises of its ilk. **GD**

HELLRAISER III: HELL ON EARTH (1992)

In retrospect, it seems inevitable that the Cenobite gang would eventually tear a bunch of souls apart in a gloriously sleazy '90s goth club, and while much has been said about this film's Boiler Room bloodbath and its delightful DJ Cenobite (who wields his crappy mix CDs like throwing stars), *Hellraiser III* deserves recognition as a crucial showcase for Doug Bradley. Juggling dual roles, the actor somehow maintains Pinhead's vibe of magisterial doom within this silly cavalcade of horror cheese, culminating in his iconic mockery of the crucifixion at the altar of a church engulfed in flames. Hell yeah. **AL**



GHOULIES III: GHOULIES GO TO COLLEGE (1990)

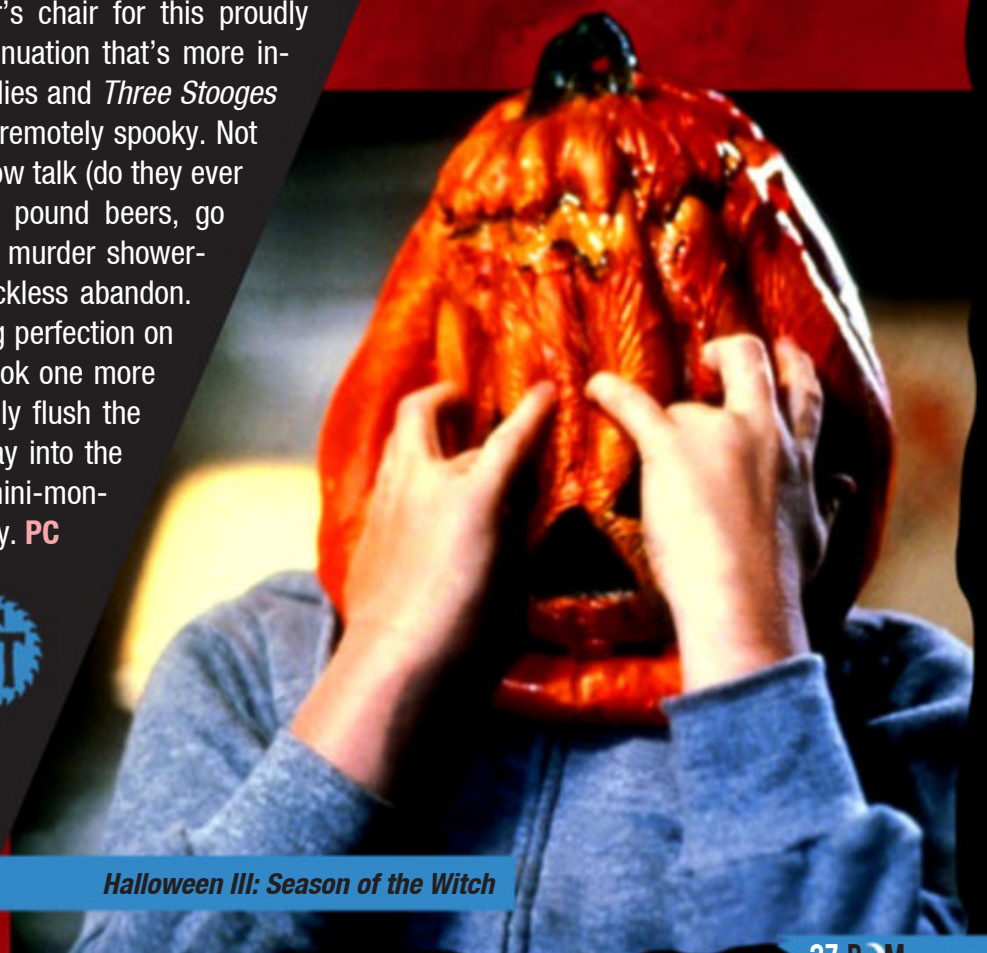
They may have started out as deadly occult demons but by this third entry, those lovable pint-sized monsters we know as ghoulies evolved into their inevitable final form – hard rockin' party dudes! The gross and goopy toilet-dwelling subhumans are back in action when they're summoned by a cranky college professor to beat out the local frat houses during their annual prank week competition. John Carl Buechler, FX maestro behind the first film, moves to the director's chair for this proudly gleeful and brainless continuation that's more inspired by '80s sex comedies and *Three Stooges* slapstick than anything remotely spooky. Not only do the ghoulies now talk (do they ever shut up?), they also pound beers, go on party raids, and murder showering coeds with reckless abandon. Despite achieving perfection on this outing, it took one more sequel to finally flush the ghoulies away into the annals of mini-monster history. **PC**

HOWLING III: THE MARSUPIALS (1987)

In the Australia-set third installment of the *Howling* franchise, director Philippe Mora introduces a new origin story for our horny lycanthropes, revealing them to be descendants of



The Exorcist III



Halloween III: Season of the Witch

Tasmanian wolves, which allows the females of the species to develop kangaroo-like pouches from which they spawn their young. (Yes, there's a baby werewolf birthing scene and, yes, it is the cutest.) Part goofy Hollywood satire, part environmental treatise, *The Marsupials* is shot like a Kate Bush music video set in the Outback and features an utterly bizarre Dame Edna cameo. Ozploitation trash perfection. **AL**

**IT'S ALIVE III:
ISLAND OF THE ALIVE (1987)**

The *It's Alive* trilogy, with its focus on environmental pollutants and mutant births, is the type of material that could spring only from the mind of the late Larry Cohen. Absurdity pervades throughout the franchise but is ratcheted up a notch here when the U.S. government orders all the plagued offspring into isolation on a remote island. The development that the monsters mature rapidly into adulthood with the ability to reproduce is inspired, and stars Michael Moriarty and Karen Black are fully tuned-in to Cohen's kooky wavelength. A worthy schlock-over-shock conclusion to the off-kilter creature feature series. **KH**

**LEATHERFACE:
THE TEXAS CHAINSAW
MASSACRE III (1990)**

Leatherface is back with a new family and has matured into a confident killing machine in this grim follow-up to Tobe Hooper's cartoonish 1986 sequel. A pre-fame Viggo Mortensen crops up as the villainous Tex, but Ken Foree is the underrated star of the show as Benny, a badass survivalist who helps a young

couple escape the lunatic Sawyer clan and their arsenal of power tools. Penned by Splatterpunk genre writer David J. Schow, **TCM III** brings the slasher element back to the franchise and continues the mission of the 1974 original to give you all the skeevies one can humanly handle. **PP**

OMEN III: THE FINAL CONFLICT (1981)

Damien grows up in this one (portrayed by a gleefully menacing Sam Neill!), but the third *Omen* film is still structured like the first two, around a

series of colourful killings. This time, commando priests spring upon the son of Satan using ancient Antichrist-killing knives but fail miserably: their demises serving as the money shots in this uneven, but never dull, entry. The clever script draws from the Good Book for horrors (with the threat of the supernatural mass slaughter of all male infants) and contains the longest infernal monologue in Devil cinema, delivered before a bare-assed statue of Christ himself. **DO**

**PHANTASM III:
LORD OF THE DEAD (1994)**

Six years after Universal's attempt to make a mainstream *Phantasm* didn't quite pan out, Don Coscarelli took back full control of the franchise and reminded everyone why creativity is more important than cash. Bringing back original cast members A. Michael Baldwin and Bill Thornbury (with the latter's Jody being resurrected as one of The Tall Man's flying spheres), Coscarelli returned to the basics with surreal set pieces and plenty of twisted sci-fi horror to go around. Add Gloria Lynne Henry as the perfect foil for Reggie Bannister's shotgun-toting ice cream man, and this is easily one of the series' most phantastic entries. **BC**

POLTERGEIST III (1988)

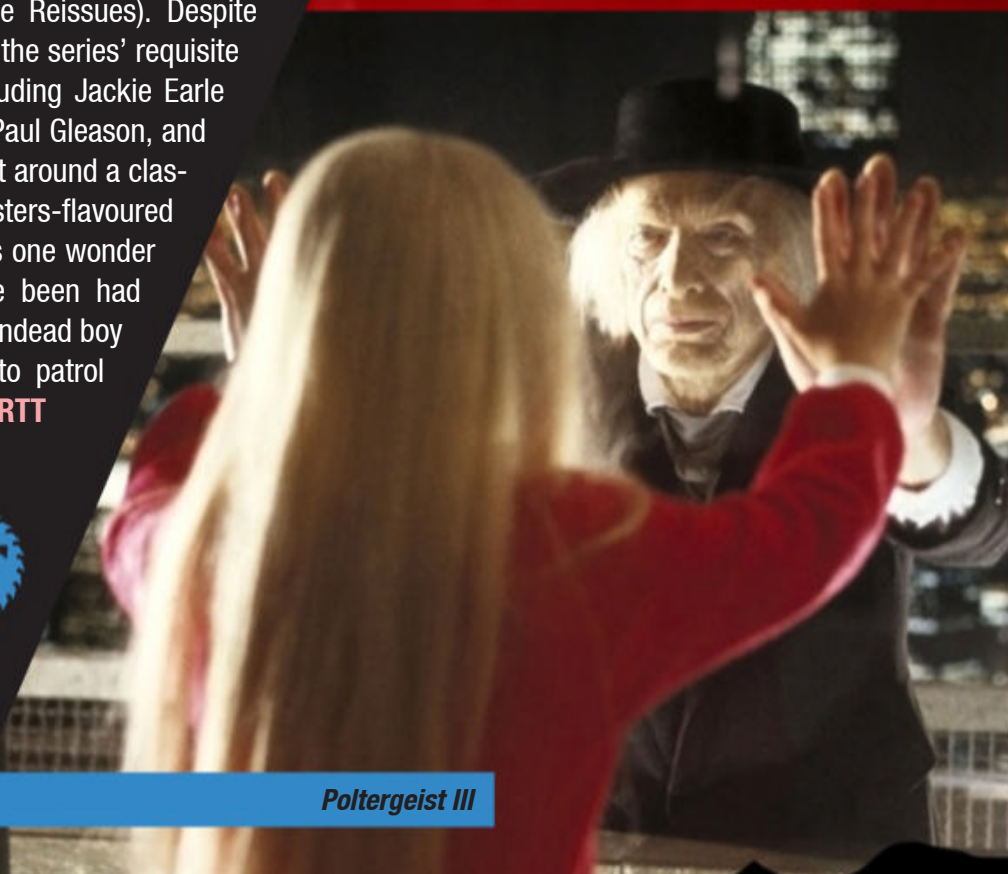
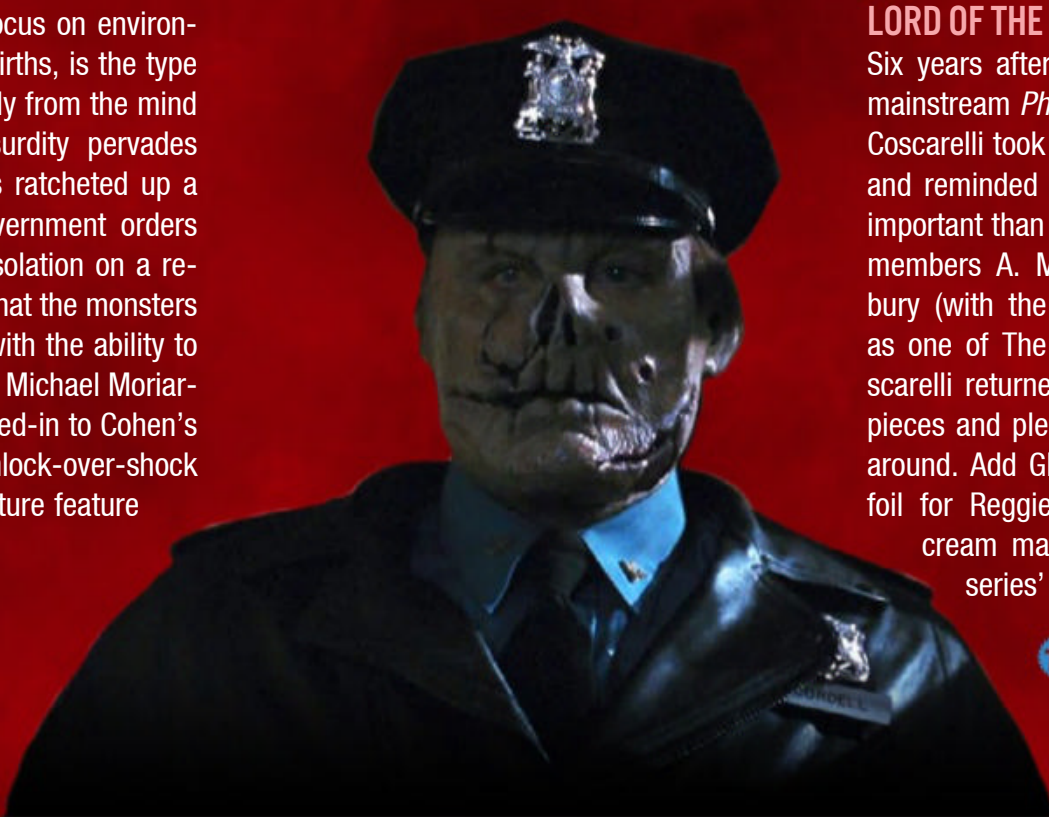
After Carol Anne's parents dump her with relatives residing in a Chicago high-rise, Tangina must once again face down supernatural forces when the Reverend Kane arrives with unfinished afterlife business in this third and final *Poltergeist* film. The shoulder pads, pastels, and perms on display are second only to Gary Sherman's masterful practical effects that turn the apartment/shopping mall/art gallery/megaplex into a wild, icy dreamscape. The over-the-top '80s indul-

MANIAC COP 3: BADGE OF SILENCE (1992)

Locked and loaded with death-defying thrills and cutting social commentary (courtesy of NYC genre virtuosos Bill Lustig and Larry Cohen), the *Maniac Cop* series is among the '80s exploitation greats, and while the first two films have been elevated to something near cult classic status as of late, this notoriously troubled third effort remains largely ignored. With Japanese distributors rejecting the notion of a Black lead and Cohen's refusal to do rewrites, *Badge of Silence* was left only partially finished by Lustig and was ultimately completed by a producer after he walked off the project (see Reissues). Despite this, the film still features the series' requisite stunts, a killer cast including Jackie Earle Haley, Robert Forster, Paul Gleason, and Ted Raimi, and is built around a classic, Universal Monsters-flavoured plotline that makes one wonder what might have been had Robert Z'Dar's undead boy in blue risen to patrol another day. **RTT**



It's Alive III: Island of the Alive



Poltergeist III

gence is grounded by a firecracker performance from Heather O'Rourke (who tragically passed during shooting) that sees our plucky young heroine bravely facing all manner of trauma from her past and present. **SP**

PROM NIGHT III: THE LAST KISS (1990)

Sinister sexpot Mary Lou Maloney is back from Hell and (what else?) using her charms to manipulate horny youths in the direct sequel to the franchise-breaking *Hello Mary Lou: Prom Night II*. When straight-A student Alex realizes that the consequences of being the undead prom queen's object of affection include the grisly murders of all those around him, he must do something to put her back where she belongs before it's too late. The farcical set pieces, ridiculous one-liners, and bad even-for-the-time special effects have aged charmingly, and are just a handful of reasons why viewers shouldn't sleep on this gem. **KH**

PUPPET MASTER III: TOULON'S REVENGE (1991)

The only true prequel to Full Moon's original 1989 cult classic takes viewers back to WWII-era Germany to learn the origins of Blade and his pals at the hands of the puppet master himself, André Toulon, who creates the homicidal marionettes in a quest for revenge. With visual effects by Oscar winner, special effects wizard, and stop-motion guru David Allen, *Toulon's Revenge* features the first appearance of fan favourite Six-Shooter and, in a notable departure from previous films, sees Toulon setting his puppets loose on the Nazi soldiers responsible for killing his wife, essentially making them the primary protagonists in this entry. **PP**

RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD III (1993)

It sucks to be dead! This third entry builds upon ideas from the first two films — a main character slowly gets zombified, and brains are eaten to alleviate the pain of being undead — while eschewing the black humour of the first and the goofiness of the clueless second. When thrill-seeking teen Julie is revived with Trioxin gas by her desperate boyfriend, she slowly, painfully morphs into a memorable, body-piercing (anti) heroine for the '90s as only Brian



Yuzna could deliver. A doomed love story with imaginative body-horror set pieces, *Return of the Living Dead III* sets itself apart by embracing romantic drama and gonzo weirdness. **DO**

SCANNERS III: THE TAKEOVER (1991)

This sequel to the 1981 Canuxploitation classic reconstitutes Cronenberg's original as a live-action comic book (plus naughty nurses, bird shit, and karate kicks) in which Liliana Komorowska — hissing and purring her way through a deliciously evil performance — plays a kind-hearted scanner turned bad boss bitch who seeks to harness the power of television for world domination. Serious-minded fans of the King of Venereal Horror may want to give this one a wide berth, but for everyone else, Québécois director Christian Duguay's film is a deliriously entertaining slice of fromage that hurls itself over-the-top with such frequency and abandon that it's almost aspirational. **RTT**

SCREAM 3 (2000)

Scream 3 might be the most comedic film in the slasher franchise, but the sleuthing-and-duelling Gale Weatherses (Courteney Cox and Parker Posey) prove such a firecracker combo you won't mind if the laughs outnumber the stabs (though there are still plenty of those as well). Moreover, the film's importance as a cultural artifact can't be denied. Predating the #MeToo movement by nearly two decades, it's a fascinating, oft-infuriating look at a time when unwanted advances, sexual assault, and "casting couches" were commonplace enough to be played for laughs. Which is more frightening: Ghostface or Hollywood? **SP**

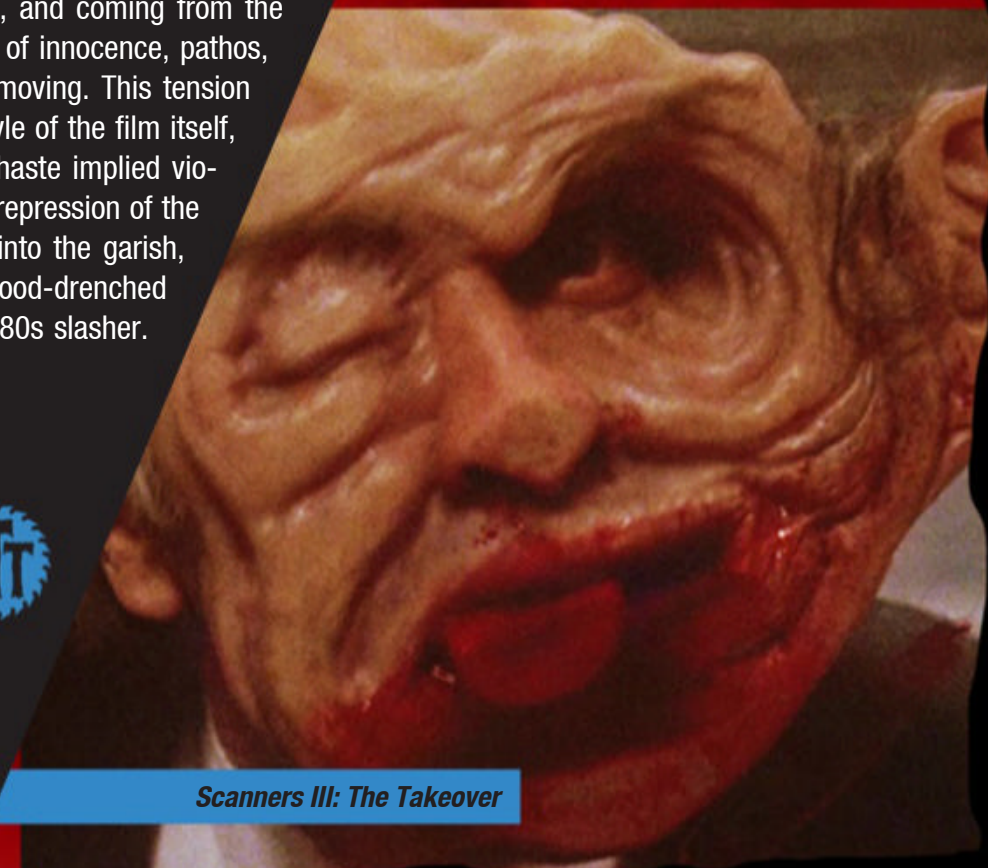
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PSYCHO III (1986)

Anthony Perkins didn't want to direct this film as he didn't believe he had the technical skill to pull it off but, as a debut, it's remarkably assured. A variation on the original, influenced by the then-popular Coen Brothers film *Blood Simple*, Perkins crafts a fascinatingly lurid noir-inspired aesthetic, particularly in one scene where Norman slowly walks along the infamous stretch of motel rooms, his face twisted with pain and rage, as balloons and streamers from a homecoming party float limply around him. While the rest of the world moves on, Norman is forever frozen in time, and coming from the aging Perkins, this mix of innocence, pathos, and fury is intensely moving. This tension is mirrored in the style of the film itself, which brings the chaste implied violence and sexual repression of the original *Psycho* into the garish, sordid, and blood-drenched world of the '80s slasher. **AL**



Return of the Living Dead III



Scanners III: The Takeover

RUE MORGUE DONS THE OL' CARDBOARD SPECS FOR A LOOK BACK AT AN EARLY 1980s TRIPTYCH OF THIRD INSTALLMENTS IN 3-D



by John W. Bowen

THE B-MOVIE VIEWING PUBLIC'S APPETITE FOR 3-D SEEMS TO SPONTANEOUSLY REANIMATE AT ROUGHLY 30-YEAR INTERVALS, AND LIKE ANY GOOD WHOREHOUSE PROPRIETOR, Hollywood leaps into action each time to indulge our baser instincts until we lose interest. Horror and sci-fi inevitably count for about two-thirds of the gimmick's target audience, meaning that as long as the trend lasts (usually a couple of years each time), any number of films in either category will be given the 3-D treatment, regardless of whether any given title actually warrants it or not.

When the fad crawled out of its grave in the early 1980s, it happened to coincide with three popular franchises coming due for their respective third installments; one might have heard multiple marketing department erections springing to life in harmony with ecstatic cries of "Part Three in 3-D!" echoing through studio conference rooms. End result: one comically catastrophic failure, one uninspired, dullardly dud, and another guilelessly gleeful pillar in one of our beloved genre's most enduring guilty pleasure franchises.

I'm really freakin' old, so only two things stuck with me from seeing [Jaws 3-D](#) (1983) during its initial theatrical run. One: I had never previously heard such hoots of derision from a theatre audience (and wouldn't again for quite a while, what with Rob Zombie's [Halloween](#) remake being decades away), and two: the shark in this movie actually went "rrroowwwrrr" whenever

it opened its toothy people-hole to chomp on another hapless landlubber. Seriously. This isn't too prominent in the sound mix but it's still plainly audible, so if the effect was intended to be subliminal, then *fail*. If it wasn't, well then *fail anyway* because sharks don't have vocal cords and hence can't go "rrroowwwrrr." And if your movie's gigantic great white shark isn't scary enough without vocal cords, well, you're pretty much bolloxed, aren't you?

A recent revisit didn't exactly win my heart. In fact – surprise! – I'd forgotten how howlingly bad this thing truly is. Any reasonable viewer will indulgently overlook some wonky visual effects in older films, but let's get a little perspective here: by summer of 1983 we already had Carpenter's [The Thing](#), the first three *Star Wars*, and – oh, right – [Jaws](#) and [Jaws 2](#). We might have been good sports about the overall look of *Jaws 3-D*'s cartoony Carcharodon, but for the love of fair Spanish ladies, the thing barely frickin' moves! Try as we might, it's a little difficult to get caught up in the heart-pounding suspense of watching the ocean's apex predator pursuing divers when they have to slow down their swimming to keep from leaving the shark behind. Toss in a couple of romantic subplots, heroic dolphins who shake their heads to warn humans that danger lurks nearby, and Lea Thompson on water skis, and no further synopsis is necessary. The experience has forced me to conclude that the only reason *Jaws 3-D*'s jaw-dropping shittiness isn't more widely guffawed is that the next install-

ment, 1987's [Jaws: The Revenge](#), is – believe it or not – substantially worse.

By contrast, [Amityville 3-D](#) (1983) isn't even entertainingly bad. I'm hard-pressed to think of another early-'80s horror film written and directed with as much utter indifference – nay, cynicism – as this one. Someone got their marching orders: slap together another [Amityville](#) sequel with some stock characters and stock scares in 3-D, pick up your paycheque, The End. Woody Allen regular Tony Roberts plays John Baxter, a recently divorced tabloid reporter who specializes in exposing phony mediums, bogus hauntings, and the like. He cavalierly moves into the Amityville house, scoffing at rumours of paranormal boogery – after all, he debunks these things for a living, right? Well, before you can say “comeuppance,” his uppance comes. The same old fly infestation still plagues 112 Ocean Avenue, along with a hellmouth-hole in the basement floor which now causes sub-*Omen* “accidents” to befall Baxter's friends and foes alike – people catch fire while driving and, er, other stuff.

It's not that one could find anything legitimately meta about the supporting cast featuring a pre-fame Meg Ryan and pre-felony-indictment Lori Laughlin, but if that enhances your enjoyment, well, better take it where you can get it. From a purely photographic standpoint it's not a bad looking film, but the would-be 3-D set pieces, while competently executed, have zero impact because they're as uninspired as anything else in the script. All of the above might still have resulted in an unremarkable but solidly entertaining little popcorn flick, had it been undertaken by anyone with a modicum of passion for the genre. (Oh, and the theatrical poster, with the giant bird claw or some damn thing springing out at you from the house? *That never even happens.*)

But don't despair – there's still hope for this eye-strain-intensive triple bill, providing you can hitch a ride to Crystal Lake. Whether viewed in its original incarnation as a 3-D theatrical feature or on home vid, [Friday the 13th Part III](#) (1982) is unlikely to convert anyone who didn't like the earlier chapters in this love-it-or-leave-it slasher series, but most fans of the franchise (this wanker included) agree that it ranks among the better entries. One could justifiably charge that it follows the tired old slasher blueprint note for note – because it certainly does – but what good is a *Friday the 13th* movie that doesn't?

Helmed by Steve Miner, who directed the fun and energetic [Part 2](#), the third installment kicks off the morning after the previous film's events (which technically makes it Saturday the 14th – okay, not going there). In familiarly workmanlike fashion, *Friday 3-D* delivers what's been ordered. The kill count is twelve (up from *Part 2*'s nine); the gore is a tad more graphic and, in some cases, more novel. There's T&A, albeit slightly less than in parts 2 and 4. And lest we forget, *Part III* premieres our boy Jason's hockey



3-D Mania: Some threequels were beyond the help of a novelty gimmick: (from top) *Friday the 13th Part III*, *Amityville 3-D*, and *Jaws 3-D*.

mask – today it's hard to fathom that he spent the entire previous entry with a burlap sack on his head. And unlike the other films under scrutiny here, this one has 3-D effects which, for the most part, not only look good but are incorporated with genuine style and wit. (When that guy passes a lit joint toward us in the opening reel, I always catch myself muttering, “Thanks, don't

mind if I do!”) The cast is well above average for a *Friday* flick and the now-obligatory Final Girl sequence is one of the most energetic and deftly played in the entire series.

Of course, the imagination boggles at anyone voluntarily subjecting their poor glazballs to three consecutive good 3-D films; in this case, whit-tling it down to one is an easy enough choice. 🍷

**TT SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT 3:
BETTER WATCH OUT! (1989)**

The fact that the late, great Monte Hellman directed this entry in the ostensible holiday horror series elevates it from a lot of nothing to a bit of something. The *Two-Lane Blacktop* filmmaker took the gig as a favour to producer Arthur Gerson, and if it occurred to him that his glory days had passed, Hellman was nevertheless proud of the efficient job he did. Scoring actors Richard Beymer and Robert Culp was a coup, and even though *SNDN3* isn't hugely Christmasy or scary, what it lacks in those things it gains in Bill Moseley with his brain in a fishbowl. **OW**

TT SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE III (1990)

The third in a slasher series notable for its all-female creative teams of writers and directors, this underseen conclusion should be sought out by any who enjoy the previous films. Utilizing a rinse-and-repeat approach with earlier plots, writer Catherine Cyran and director Sally Mattison's entry continues the creative slaughter of sexy coeds at the business end of a very large drill. Although Brittain Frye's third most impressive "Driller Killer" lacks the perversity or musical aptitude of his predecessors, he imbues the role with a boy-next-door charm that makes the character cool and creepy in his own unique way. **KH**

TT WISHING STAIRS (2003)

Like the other films in South Korea's groundbreaking *Whispering Corridors* series, *Wishing Stairs* is a thoughtful rumination rooted in the social circumstances, anxieties, and troubles faced by students at an all-girls high school. Body issues, bullying, peer pressure, lesbianism, burgeoning sexuality, and the ruthless competition fostered in the brutal Korean school system are addressed in this beautiful, sad tale about a wish-granting staircase that's steeped in folklore. As if that's not enough to handle, these students also have to worry about possession, ghosts, and murderers. Not to be missed, especially for fans of K-horror. **SP**



Silent Night, Deadly Night 3



Slumber Party Massacre III

SON OF FRANKENSTEIN (1939)

A difficult production by a journeyman director, *Son of Frankenstein* rose from the slab as something extraordinary. Arguably the first ever horror threequel, the gap between James Whale's two originals and this Rowland V. Lee continuation isn't any longer than that between Whale's films, but *Son* immediately feels as if it belongs to a different generation: ditching opulent production design in favour of starkly empty interiors sketched in expressionist shadows. The narrative's relation to the past is equally loose, simultaneously set 30 years later and a complete retcon of previous events. Basil Rathbone – only months away from becoming Sherlock Holmes – tips into histrionics, and some might say the film wastes Boris Karloff (in his last appearance as the monster), but this is the Bela Lugosi Show, with the erstwhile Dracula seizing a potentially thankless henchman role and running with it, gloriously, before later donning the flat-top himself. **OW**





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OVER HALF A CENTURY AGO IN LATIN AMERICA, THERE AROSE A MINI AGE OF HAIRING WOMEN, VAMPIRE QUEENS, AND SOME OF THE GREATEST FEMINIST HORROR MOVIES YOU'VE NEVER SEEN

MOTHERS OF THE MEXICAN GOTHIC

BY LISA MORTON

I MAGINE YOU'RE WATCHING A VINTAGE VAMPIRE FLICK THAT YOU'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE. It's drenched in Gothic design — a half-ruined, cobwebbed estate; an aristocratic vampire decked out in a black cape; close-ups of hypnotic eyes intercut with swooning victims — with a decent enough plot centring on that same vamp trying to turn the young heiress of the estate so he can take it over. So far it might be a Hammer film you somehow missed. And then this thing takes a serious left turn: not only does the caped bloodsucker have a charismatic and powerful female partner, but (mild yet necessary spoiler alert) the slayer turns out to be not the handsome doctor visiting the estate but an elderly aunt.

You're not in Hammer-land anymore.

The film is 1957's *El vampiro* (*The Vampire*, also known as *Lust of the Vampire*), which inaugurated a cycle of Gothic horror movies produced in Mexico for the next five years. Shot in black and white and owing a heavy debt to the Universal horror films of the '30s and '40s, these movies would not just

reimagine such classic characters as Frankenstein's monster, the mummy, and the vampire, they would often pack the stories with surprisingly feminist plots, characters, and themes. The fact that they were doing this chronologically alongside the Hammer films and the early work of Mario Bava, and yet are often skipped by film scholars in discussions of global horror movie history, makes them even more startling and worthy of appreciation.

The whole thing started with a man named [Abel Salazar](#). In 1957, the Golden Age of Mexican cinema was on the wane; the melodramas, comedies, and *rancheras* (westerns) that audiences had savoured for two decades had run their course, with box office numbers fading as television was rising in popularity. Forty-year-old actor Salazar, who'd specialized in romcoms, formed his own company (called ABSA) and began looking for something new. Turning to Hollywood, Salazar studied what had made Universal a for-



tune and settled on horror, beginning with *El vampiro* (a sequel, *El ataúd del vampiro* – *The Vampire's Coffin* – followed in short order).

ABSA had deep resources to pull from, borrowing sets, costumes, laboratories, and craftspeople from Mexico City's legendary Churubusco Studios; the stars were actors who had already worked for decades, including many who had been nominated for or had won the Ariel, Mexico's version of the Oscar. The films Salazar produced are drenched in eye-popping design, atmospheric black-and-white photography, some genuine shocks, and a nationalist streak that saw mummies moved from Egypt to Aztec ruins while homegrown legends like the vengeful La Llorona and handsome *vaqueros* were planted right next to mad scientists and their European-style creations. These films are neither as gruesome nor as overtly sexual as their British kin, but they don't shy away from violence and passionate madness, and are still more lurid than American horror movies of the time.

Some fans might know the one breakout cult hit from this cycle: the thoroughly daft *The Brainiac* (*El barón del terror*), produced by and starring Sala-

zar as the brain-sucking, head-inflating title creature. Most of the Mexican horror movies from this period were acquired by the American entrepreneur K. Gordon Murray and released in the U.S. (mostly to television) with fast, cheap English dubs and new titles. The films resurfaced in the 2000s thanks to a combination of festivals and the now-defunct DVD company Casa Negra, which released remastered versions with extras. Surprisingly few fans, though, have seen anything beyond that outlier, and so might be surprised to learn that these movies are usually serious, well-crafted and downright woman-centric. Over in Italy, Mario Bava transformed Barbara Steele into a terrifying embodiment of feminine wrath in *Black Sunday* (1960), but it's a stretch to suggest that this classic tale of a vengeful witch returned from the grave is a particularly feminist film. It would take Bava's Mexican counterparts to expand that element.

The Mexican Gothics frequently make their female characters as intriguing and strong as their men. In addition to *El vampiro*'s stake-wielding auntie, there's 1957's *The Aztec Mummy* (*La momia azteca*) featuring headstrong young heroine Flor (played by popular Mexican scream queen Rosita Arenas, who will figure more prominently later in this piece). When she's not volunteering

for scientific experiments in hypnosis and reincarnation that send her back to a previous life as an acolyte of an Aztec deity, Flor is donning jodhpurs and boots to lead the way up the steep side of the Aztec pyramid while the men straggle behind. *La momia azteca* (which, by the way, was scripted by Abel Salazar's brother Alfredo) borrows the reincarnated lost love angle of Universal's *The Mummy* (1932), but gives it a few interesting twists, including the rather startling suggestion that when Flor was Xochitl, the temple virgin, she was actually more interested in fulfilling her religious duties than the attentions of the warrior Popoca.

If we're measuring these films up against feminist standards, however, we need to especially focus on three titles that come later in the cycle.

Let's start with *The Witch's Mirror* (*El espejo de la bruja*), produced by Abel Salazar (although he doesn't appear in it) and directed by Chano Urueta, whose 1954 film *The Witch* (*La bruja*) is often credited with being the grandmother to the Gothic cycle (although it's actually non-supernatural). Salazar and Urueta had also paired for *The Brainiac*, but they brought a radically different sensibility to *The Witch's Mirror*. Released in 1962, the film is essentially a supernatural *Rebecca*: after a man's first wife dies, he remarries and brings his bride home to the family estate, much to the consternation of the housekeeper, Sara. There are a couple of key differences, though: the housekeeper is a witch



and godmother to the first wife, and there's no mystery whatsoever as to the demise of Wife #1, since the film begins with Eduardo, the husband, murdering her in cold blood. There's also a bit of *Gaslight* (the husband persistently denies supernatural occurrences happening right in front of them), *Mad Love* (severed hands), and *Eyes Without a Face* (after being horribly burned, the second wife spends the last half of the film with her head bandaged).

The Witch's Mirror is almost a four-character piece (although there is one lab assistant and a few policemen who factor in halfway through), with the dynamics between the three women propelling the story. Yes, Sara, the housekeeper (Isabela Corona) — who was devoted to the first wife Elena, now a ghost — is out to wreak revenge on the husband through his new wife, Deborah (Rosita Arenas), but Deborah is large-





Gore, Por Favor: (Above) Tundra (Ofelia Montesco) watches as her fanged thugs tie down the titular luchador in *Santo vs. the Vampire Women*, (and opposite, from top) *El vampiro*, the bizarre creature from *The Brainiac*, and Eduardo (Armando Calvo) experiments on his wife Deborah (Rosita Arenas) in *The Witch's Mirror*.

"THESE MOVIES WOULD NOT JUST REIMAGINE SUCH CLASSIC CHARACTERS AS FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER, THE MUMMY, AND THE VAMPIRE, THEY WOULD OFTEN PACK THE STORIES WITH SURPRISINGLY FEMINIST PLOTS, CHARACTERS, AND THEMES."

ly sympathetic and tries to befriend the housekeeper. Because the husband is a surgeon by vocation — and because this is a Mexican horror movie — we know that at some point this will veer into mad scientist territory, but here we get the delights of science vs. magic, with the doctor's masculine hubris the real terror on display. The witch, meanwhile, is the hero(ine) of the story,



seeking revenge on the callous killer of her beloved goddaughter; Corona, a long-established star and almost 50 when she took on the part of Sara, brings gravitas and quiet assurance to her performance, whether she's showing her goddaughter demons in the haunted mirror or calling on "Adonai" and "Elohim" to aid her (suggesting she might actually be practicing white magic more than black). Unfortunately, a prologue (and epilogue) telling us how evil witches are was likely added after the fact, when someone looked at this film and objected to a woman exercising spectacular power, albeit via occult means. If *The Witch's Mirror* has one serious flaw, it's that Deborah is a pawn throughout, subjected to horrors inflicted by both Eduardo and Sara; she never becomes a particularly proactive or aware character, despite the strong performance of Rosita Arenas.

The next of our trio of neglected gems is the

one that some aficionados of this cycle consider the end of it: 1962's *Santo vs. the Vampire Women* (*Santo vs. las mujeres vampiros*). Although wrestling star Santo had already made a few films prior to this one, *Santo vs. the Vampire Women* gave him his first real starring role, thus paving the way for the future of the Mexican genre film industry, which would soon shift from the black-and-white Gothics to *lucha libre* pictures starring Santo, Blue Demon, and a host of (often supernatural) villains. *Santo vs. the Vampire Women*, however, still feels like it belongs firmly within the Gothic milieu, with its spooky sets and rich black-and-white cinematography. This one was, for a change, not produced by Abel Salazar, although Salazar had worked with director Alfonso Corona Blake on 1961's *The World of the Vampires* (*El mundo de los vampiros*), an entertaining but silly vamp-romp with a low budget that showed in its ludicrous

MEXICAN GOTHIC MOVIES
LIBERALLY PULLED FROM
UNIVERSAL HORROR, REIMAGINING
CLASSIC ICONS IN THE PROCESS

MEXICAN MONSTERS

BY LISA MORTON

THE VAMPIRE

In 1957's *The Vampire* (*El vampiro*), Count Lavud is not just a suave, caped bloodsucker (Germán Robles), he's also the first cinematic vampire to bear elongated canines (rows of pointed teeth borne by *Nosferatu* notwithstanding). After playing Count Lavud, Robles would go on to play a vampire called "Nostradamus" in a series of films.

FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER

The Monster in *The Hell of Frankenstein* (*Orlak, el infierno de Frankenstein*, 1960) starts off handsome, but being near any fire erodes his appearance.



THE MUMMY

In 1957's *The Aztec Mummy* (*El momia azteca*), the eponymous character guards the relics in the heart of an Aztec pyramid, but he's really all about the love (for his lost – and then reincarnated – love Xochitl). He also gets a lot more screen time than Karloff did in Universal's *The Mummy* (1932).



papier-mâché masks for the less-aristocratic bloodsuckers.

Now, here's where *Santo vs. the Vampire Women* stands apart from virtually all other Mexican (or, for that matter, global) vampire movies of the early '60s: not only does it focus on an ancient matriarchal society of powerful female vampires, it's also drenched in queer subtext. The movie begins with the awakening of several dozen vampires from a 200-year sleep. They're being called to undead life again because their queen, Zorina (popular B-movie actress Lorena Velázquez), must descend to take the throne of Hell, and her prophesied but unwitting successor, Diana (María Duval), is about to turn 21, the age at which she must take Zorina's place. Zorina's chief lieutenant, the statuesque and formidable Tundra (played by the real-life statuesque and formidable Ofelia Montesco), is put in charge of Diana's kidnapping and transformation, aided by her three musclebound vampire henchmen. Tundra is openly contemptuous of men, purring that she enjoys using her beauty to seduce them; note that the vampire women reside in coffins in the caverns beneath their half-ruined estate, while the three wrestling Renfields are kept chained on the first floor. When Tundra and her hunky flunkies head to a local nightclub to round up victims, she is only interested in sucking the blood of other women. Captured men are brought back to the vampire women's ruined estate, where their blood is drained for Queen Zorina to consume before their bodies are tossed disdainfully into a fire.

One of the notable aspects of *Santo vs. the Vampire Women* is the way the women function together. Tundra is dedicated to Zorina, and she seems earnestly devoted to serving the matriarch beyond the threat of punishment should she fail. Although the other vampire women are ultimately (and disappointingly) kept out of the plot, serving little purpose beyond window dressing (at least the direction and cinematography are free of male gaze-style shots lingering on the women's bodies), Tundra and Zorina treat them with respect, making sure that each receives a share of the sacrificial blood necessary to fully restore them.

Tundra's chief assignment is capturing Diana, Zorina's replacement, but she's failed at the task once before (200 years ago, during one of Diana's previous incarnations), and it isn't going to be easy this time, either: not only is Diana's

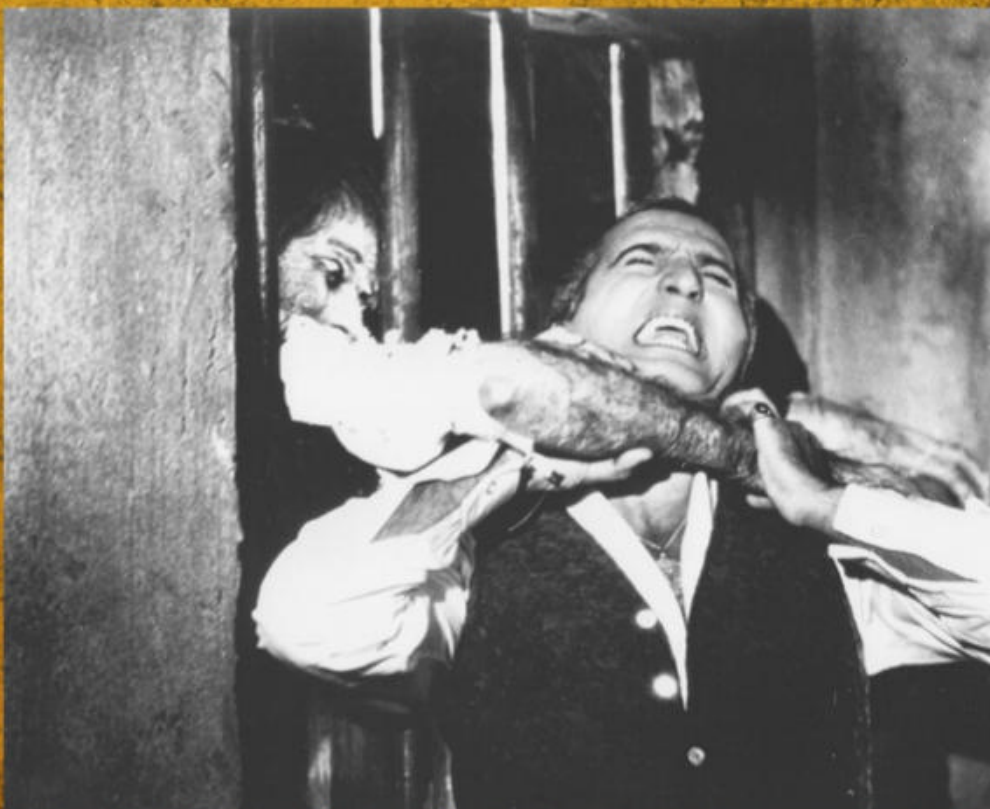
father a professor of antiquities who has translated ancient scrolls revealing his daughter's fate, but Dad's best bud is *luchadore*/megastar Santo, who drives around in a sleek MG convertible fighting anyone who threatens Diana. Santo is far more help than Diana's fiancé Jorge, who blithely comments on how he'll be controlling her actions after their marriage and then a few minutes later is ogling Tundra, obviously smitten even without her use of hypnotic powers. At this point, viewers are likely to think that Diana – who seems far smarter and stronger than Jorge – would in fact be better off taking over as queen of the vampire women after Zorina goes straight to Hell.

The real feminist classic to emerge from this cycle, though, is *The Curse of the Crying Woman* (*La maldición de la Llorona*), produced by Salazar's ABSA and directed by Rafael Baledón, who also made the Mexican Gothic take on Frankenstein, 1960's *The Hell of Frankenstein* (*Orlak, el infierno de Frankenstein*), along with around 90 other films. *The Curse of the Crying Woman* follows young Amelia (none other than Rosita Arenas), returning to her family estate with her new husband (played by Salazar, who married Arenas in real life), only to have her Aunt Selma, the



last of her family, reveal a terrible family curse: their ancestor is the notorious La Llorona herself, and Amelia is expected to resurrect her at midnight on her approaching 25th birthday.

One of the most famous ghost legends worldwide, La Llorona has scared the crap out of moviegoers since 1933, when she first appeared onscreen in the Mexican flick *La Llorona*. The folktale itself – about the woman who goes mad when her lover abandons her, causing



My Llorona: The entranced Amelia (Rosita Arenas) works to free her spectral ancestor (top), and hairy-armed Daniel (Enrique Lucero) gets the drop on Jaime (Abel Salazar) in *The Curse of the Crying Woman*.

her to drown her two children and return as the wailing ghost who wanders shores and waterways, seeking living children to replace those she lost — dates back centuries. In one version, La Llorona is the indigenous mistress of the conquistador Hernán Cortés, and she murders her children by him when he refuses to take her back to Spain. During the Mexican Gothic cycle she played a significant part in several of the films, including the horror-mystery-western mash-up *The Living Coffin* (1959), about a bunch of bad guys who are using the legend of La Llorona to scare the locals away from a gold mine they've discovered (the 1932 *La Llorona* also uses the legend to cover a non-supernatural crime).

Although Baledón's film paints La

Llorona as little more than an executed witch seeking justice (there's no mention made of her murdered children, although local audiences likely didn't need it), *The Curse of the Crying Woman* nevertheless comes closer to capturing the legend's creepy take on the rage of a scorned woman than any other version. The film opens with Selma and her scarred, hunchbacked assistant Juan (famed character actor Carlos López Moctezuma) stopping a coach on a foggy night to murder the driver and the three travellers. The scene owes an obvious debt to *Black Sunday*, stealing not just the famed shot of the black-cloaked woman holding the leashes of three powerful dogs (an image that would become *Crying Woman*'s poster art), but also the scenes of the carriage

GHOSTS

In *The Living Coffin* (*El grito de la muerte*, 1959), the ghostly wailing woman may turn out to be a perfectly human hoax, but ghosts in these Mexican films were never shown as translucent or ethereal. *The Living Coffin*, by the way, is actually in colour, which is why it's not always included in lists of the Mexican Gothic films.



THE MAD DOCTOR

In *The Aztec Mummy Against the Humanoid Robot* (1958's *La momia azteca contra el robot humano*, the third and last of the Aztec mummy movies), the mad scientist Dr. Krupp is a former colleague of the first film's kindly protagonist, now bent on revenge; in the first Aztec Mummy film (*La momia azteca*), he was revealed (spoiler alert!) to be the supervillain known as "The Bat."

THE WITCH

Technically 1954's *The Witch* (*La bruja*) is earlier than this cycle, but this non-supernatural tale of a poor woman cursed with horrific features who is transformed by a mad scientist into a beautiful instrument of revenge is often credited with being the Gothics' precursor.

THE HUNCHBACKED ASSISTANT

In *The Curse of the Crying Woman* (*La maldición de la Llorona*, 1963), the witch's assistant is the hunchbacked, club-footed, scarred Juan, who is devoted to her and is also a damned fine knife-thrower. Like Bela Lugosi's Ygor from *The Son of Frankenstein* (1939), he once survived hanging.

THE MANIAC

Because we're talking Mexican movies, the maniac here is a woman: the violent madwoman ("La Gitana," or "the gypsy," played by Carolina Barret) from *The Black Pit of Dr. M* (1959's *Misterios de ultratumba*), who can be quieted only by a music box.

THE ANIMAL-MAN

In 1961's *The World of the Vampires* (*El mundo de vampiros*), the vampires' victims who don't die slowly transform into hairy fiends (similarly, in *Santo vs. the Vampire Women*, one of the three male vampires turns into a hirsute beast when he enters a ring to wrestle Santo).

THE DEMON

There's really no better description for the huge-headed, forked-tongue, brain-sucking thing in *The Brainiac* (*El barón del terror*, 1960). Seriously...what *is* that supposed to be? 🧛‍♂️



A Woman Scorned: Of *La Llorona*'s many cinematic adaptations, Rafael Baledón's 1961 film boasts a strong feminist take.

travelling through a bleak, sinister forest. The film quickly asserts its own powers, however, by having Selma the witch turn the snarling, foaming dogs loose to attack the travellers, as she watches with black-on-black eyes. In its opening minutes, *The Curse of the Crying Woman* has already racked up a body count of four.

Soon after, Selma's niece Amelia (yes, Rosita Arenas) arrives at the half-ruined hacienda with her new husband Jaime (Salazar); as Amelia pulls a black shroud from a mirror in the guest room only to encounter a terrifying omen of death, Selma's in her workshop in the basement of the bell tower, transforming from a skull-faced bat creature in order to confer with the ancient, desiccated corpse of *La Llorona* herself. As Selma watches, nearly cackling with anticipation, the remains begin to return to life... a sure sign that Amelia is near and about to fulfill her destiny.

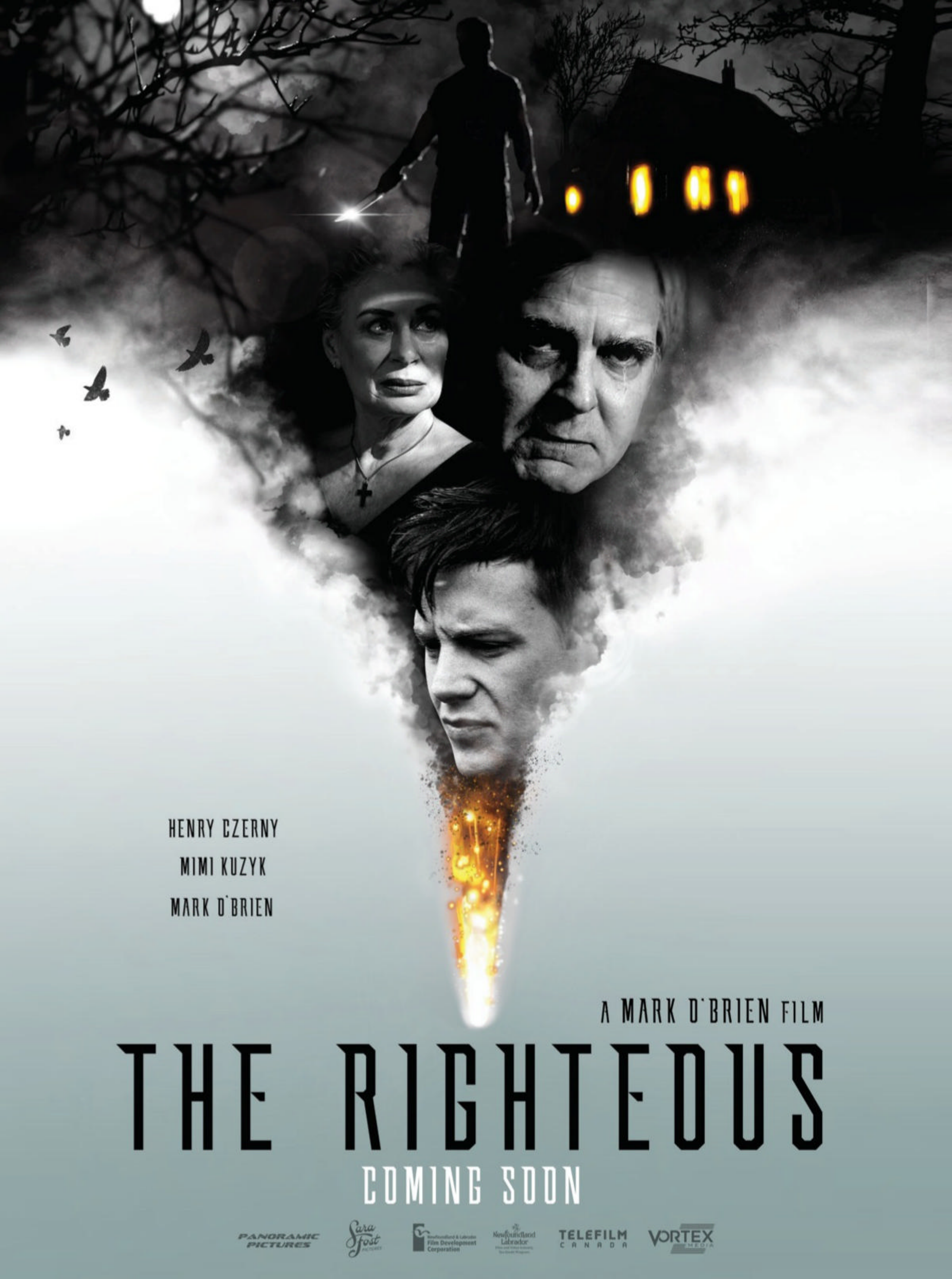
Selma calls Amelia to her by playing sombre chords on a great pipe organ (and hey, when was the last time you saw a *woman* playing the creepy organ in a Universal flick?), and at last reveals the true family legacy to her unfortunate niece. Both Rita Macedo as Selma and Arenas as Amelia shine in this scene, as they verbally spar. The two actresses came from similar backgrounds: both sprang from artistic families (Arenas' father was an actor, Macedo's moth-

"THESE FILMS ARE NEITHER AS GRIEUSOME NOR AS OVERTLY SEXUAL AS THEIR BRITISH KIN, BUT THEY DON'T SHY AWAY FROM VIOLENCE AND PASSIONATE MADNESS, AND ARE STILL MORE CURIO THAN AMERICAN HORROR MOVIES OF THE TIME."

er was the writer Julia Guzmán), both married film producers (although Macedo's third husband was the writer Carlos Fuentes), both had made dozens of films before 1960, and both had worked with the legendary Luis Buñuel. Macedo had also done a considerable amount of stage work, and she brings tremendous authority to her performance. She is sure of her power, confident in a way that even villainesses are seldom allowed to be (she even tells Amelia that their ancestor *La Llorona* "was terrifying because she wanted power"). Her performance, thankfully, is matched by Arenas, who could have played Amelia as the docile ingénue in jeopardy, but instead is wonderfully strong-willed and resolute.

By comparison, the men in *The Curse of the Crying Woman* don't fare well, either emotionally or physically. Amelia's husband Jaime is easily enchanted by Selma, while there's yet one more terrible secret regarding the whereabouts of Selma's supposedly dead husband Daniel. Selma describes her assistant Juan as a "faithful dog," and even the police who show up a few times to investigate the murders surrounding the hacienda are easily overcome. The world of *Crying Woman*, in which the women of a family are tied to one another by a quest for power, virtually excludes men from its inner workings.

The Curse of the Crying Woman marks the real end of the Mexican Gothic cycle (although there's some argument over its date – it seems to have been produced in 1961 but not released until 1963): it was the last horror film Abel Salazar would produce, it was the last film Rosita Arenas would make for 24 years (she left the industry to become Salazar's full-time wife and a mother), and it was (arguably) the peak artistic achievement of the cycle. What's inarguable is that *The Curse of the Crying Woman* achieved something truly remarkable in its use of women and its self-awareness of how women who seek power are viewed. It continues to thrill, entertain, and even provoke a few knowing nods more than half a century later. 🐾



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PRIDE OF CHUCKY

BY ROCCO T. THOMPSON

THE '80s, AS THEY SAY, ARE BACK, BUT SOME
REAGAN-ERA TOUCHSTONES NEVER LEFT.

Unlike cassette tapes, acid washes, and Teddy Ruxpin, the *Child's Play* series has persisted, Madonna-like, through three decades of critical indifference, IP struggles, and shifting popular tastes to remain one of the longest-running horror franchises around. More impressive still: the seven-film saga has maintained an unbroken (though often knotty) chronology overseen in nearly every iteration by its creator, Don Mancini.

Though rightly famous for sticking to his guns in his fierce dedication to the ongoing evolution of his red-headed only child, Chucky's newest destination, the serialized TV format, was nowhere near Mancini's radar when the first film became a hit in 1988.

"The whole notion of movies moving to TV, it wasn't really a thing then," Mancini tells *Rue Morgue*. "I first thought of it when I worked on [NBC's] *Hannibal* for Bryan Fuller, and the idea of doing that with Chucky seemed very intriguing."

For those only casually acquainted with the killer doll, this comparison may seem like a stretch, but for superfans and the writer/director himself, it's simply the next chapter for an iconic character who's been allowed to run, armed and cackling, through myriad genres, styles, and now, formats over the past three decades.

"In a way, over the course of thirtysomething years, we have been spinning a serial," says Mancini. "It's this complicated tapestry of storytelling that we've been doing, but it has real continuity. You can set the fuses early and let them burn longer. You have more feathers in your quiver, you have much more opportunity for psychological suspense and tension than you do in a 90-minute film: being able to see how Chucky can affect the world, not in the most obvious way, but also through psychological violence."

Chucky stars Zackary Arthur (*Mom and Dad*) as Jake Wheeler, a gay teen living in an idyllic American town. A loner struggling with the recent death of his mother, Jake is constantly bullied by his all-American jock cousin, Junior (Teo Briones), and Junior's high school princess girlfriend Lexy (Alyvia Alyn Lind). But this balance is upset when a vintage Good Guy doll turns up at a local yard sale, kicking off a string of murders that catch the attention of adolescent true crime junkie Devon (Björgvin Arnarson) who's hell-bent on investigating the town's mysterious tragedies – both past and present – while Lexy's mother, Mayor Michelle Cross (Barbara Alyn Woods), does all she can to put a PR-friendly happy face on the killings. On board behind the scenes are David Kirschner, who's been producing since the 1988 original, and Nick Antosca, the creator of the instantly indelible but unfortunately cancelled Syfy series, *Channel Zero*.

For Mancini, who's carried Chucky along in his subconscious for 33



years, autobiographical aspects were bound to emerge.

"In a way, [it's] the most personal iteration of the queer content that I've ever done," he admits. "I don't think I really copped to how personal it was [until] Zackary called me and said, 'I know I'm playing you.' But it's not exactly true, or not strictly true. As [a] writer, I'm in all the characters."

Besides the crop of fresh young faces that make up the cast (plus '90s horror royalty and social media must-follow Devon Sawa), *Chucky* is stuffed with characters that fans have come to love, including Alex Vincent as OG object of the doll's terror Andy Barclay, who made his series return in *Cult of Chucky* (2017), 27 years after his last appearance in *Child's Play 2* (1990). Andy's foster sister, Kyle, played by Christine Elise McCarthy, is also back (having previously been featured in *Cult's* post-credits stinger) and, of course, Brad Dourif and series regular Jennifer Tilly are on hand as the main monster and his gal Friday, Tiffany Valentine, who was recently reincarnated in the body of... Hollywood actress Jennifer Tilly (it's complicated).

The series will also see the return of newer addition Fiona Dourif, daughter of Brad, who first appeared as the wheelchair-bound Nica in 2013's *Curse of Chucky*. In a case of meta-narrative leaping right off the screen, *Cult of Chucky* saw Nica turn heel, becoming the physical host of Chucky's malevolent soul.

"I wanted Fiona playing a villain in *Cult of Chucky* because she resembles her father to such an extent, and it sort of pointed in a really new interesting direction for the franchise," explains Mancini. "We definitely find out what's going on with that character in the TV series."

"It's always our mission to try and reinvent it every time," he says, adding that he sees the upcoming series as his own deranged spin on the nighttime soap opera, summing it up as "Chucky meets *Big Little Lies*."

"We try to plug it into different subgenres and create different tones," he says. "We've done slasher movies, comedies, gothic... the idea of plugging Chucky into eight hours of television, where you have so much time to develop characters and relationships, that really appealed to me."

Among the more unexpected and delightful of these past few cinematic reinventions is the overt queering of the franchise. Since 1998's *Bride of Chucky*, Mancini has injected his gayer sensibilities, often swimming against the tide of popular appeal with a campy self-reflexivity, but this change soon grew beyond subtext into the realm of outright parody and reverent homage: *Seed* introduced Chucky and Tiffany's agender progeny, Glen/Glenda (voiced by Billy Boyd), named in reference to Ed Wood's semi-autobiographical 1953 cross-dressing drama, and featured the "pope of trash" himself, John Waters, as a scum-sucking paparazzo. *Curse* and *Cult*

"YOU HAVE MUCH MORE OPPORTUNITY FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL SUSPENSE AND TENSION THAN YOU DO IN A 90-MINUTE FILM."

— DON MANCINI





Mancini's Muse: Creator Don Mancini has tackled a wide variety of narratives involving his iconic killer doll. (Opposite, from top): Scenes from *Child's Play 2*, *Cult of Chucky*, and *Bride of Chucky*, and (above) cuts from Mancini's new *Chucky* series.

brought realistic gay and lesbian characters into the franchise with actors Danielle Bisutti and Zak Santiago — a welcome reflection of life as it looks outside of the manufactured heteronormative world typically depicted in popular horror. Most recently, *Cult* concluded with a snog between newly reunited lovers-on-the-run Chuck and Tiff in the fleshly forms of the younger Dourif and Tilly, punctuated with a wry, “Works for me!” in one of the series’ frequent nods to Tilly’s iconic turn in the Wachowskis’ celebrated 1996 lesbian neo-noir *Bound*.

It was a bold move that paid off, if not necessarily in the financial sense.

“*Seed of Chucky* [2004], didn’t do very well at the time it was released, [but it’s] had a kind of renaissance,” reflects Mancini. “It’s been very nice to hear from queer kids and young trans kids that that movie in particular meant so much to them — that they felt they were represented in a mainstream horror movie in a way that they hadn’t seen before. That was worth more to me than box office.”

The series’ status as a mainstream beacon for queer horror is not lost on Syfy (the home of the upcoming *Chucky* TV series), who ran a “Pride of Chucky” marathon this past June. For Mancini, this was proof positive that they had found the right home for the next chapter in his story.

“I loved that they did that,” he says. “I thought it was really a perfect promo for the series as well, because we are going even further with that. I think, when I was a teenager, I would have appreciated seeing gay kids my age in pop culture more. It is a good thing to put into the world.”

If the last several entries are any indication, the TV series will expand upon the *Child’s Play* mythos in ways both exciting and novel, but fans will be interested to know that Mancini doesn’t have a strict roadmap for the world he’s built; it’s more of an ongoing process, and one that he dedicates his many waking hours to brainstorming.

“I think about it a lot, probably more than is strictly sane, but it’s my job,” he says with a smirk. “I love thinking about what kind of situations Chucky could affect. What kind of characters could Chucky have an impact on? [I’ve been thinking] about it so much over, virtually, my whole entire adult life. You know, I’m sort of very well qualified to do it.”

Of course, for those in the know, there’s an elephant in the room by the name of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and the rights issues that came to a head in July 2018 when a “reboot” was announced without the blessing of Kirschner or Mancini — an episode almost as complex as the series chronology. MGM distributed the first *Child’s Play* way back in 1988, and although Universal distributed a handful of entries throughout the next decade (with a hand-off to Rogue and Relativity Media for *Seed of Chucky*) and is handling the TV series, MGM still retains the rights

“NOT ONLY IS IT A RETURN TO THE STRAIGHTFORWARD SCARES OF THE FIRST COUPLE OF MOVIES, IT HAS REAL HEART IN A WAY THAT I THINK MIGHT SURPRISE PEOPLE.”

— DON MANCINI



*A Friend 'Til The End: Later entries to the **Child's Play** series included queer themes and subplots, which Mancini intends to carry forward with the TV series.*

to the original 1988 film, which allowed them to sign off on the Lars Klevberg remake, which saw Mark Hamill voicing a high-tech, mechanized version of the slasher made famous by Dourif.

Mancini, for his part, took the project in stride like he does every other setback, hurdle, and inconvenience that plagues his cinematic spawn.

“It was annoying when it was announced, because we didn’t know what kind of a splash that might make,” he recalls. “If it had been successful, it might have hurt our plans for Universal. Fortunately, the movie didn’t do that well. I didn’t see the film, because I didn’t want to be distracted by it, but I hope we’ve seen the last of robo Chucky.”

As for what he hopes long-time viewers will take away from the *Chucky* series, Mancini turns unexpectedly tender.

“The candle that they hold aloft in worship of Chucky... I hope it keeps those candles burning,” he says. “I hope that they will enjoy the tone of the show, which, I think will be surprising to a bunch of fans. Not only is it a return to the straightforward scares of the first couple of movies, it has real heart in a way that I think might surprise people.”

He continues, “One of my ambitions with the show, and with writing this character who is sort of a troubled gay kid, is I wanted to bring a little bit of real-life pain to it. I think people might be surprised by that and how much heart it has. Honestly, our hope with this show is not only that people will scream and laugh, but that they will be surprised that they may shed a

tear, as well.”

Whether *Chucky* will have a second season, serve as a prequel to another movie, or shift into another medium entirely is anybody’s guess, but as a director used to changing gears when things fall through, Mancini remains unflaggingly confident. Make no mistake: win, lose, or draw, the *Child’s Play* series, like the possessed doll who carries it, will remain notoriously hard to kill.

“The show must go on,” he says. “We all work for Chucky now. Chucky is our boss. We are all serving the same master here. And, if we disobey or displease Chucky in some way, he will carry on.” 🧟





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MEET MICHELINE PITT AND LYNH HAAGA, TWO INNOVATIVE
STYLE MAVENS WHO ARE CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN FAN
FASHION AND GOTH GLAMOUR

FEMMES FATALES

BY ANDREA SUBISSATI

BACK IN 2019, REEBOK PARTNERED WITH 20TH CENTURY FOX TO COMMEMORATE ALIEN DAY (April 26, in reference to the moon where the xenomorphs were discovered: LV-426). Cinephiles and sneaker freaks camped outside of Foot Lockers, credit cards clenched in sweaty hands, to pick up a pair of mint condition Alien Stompers – laceless high-top sneakers designed by Tuan Le that look just like the ones worn by Ellen Ripley in the final moments of the groundbreaking 1986 sequel. The super-limited shoes sold out immediately – appearing instantly on resale sites for quadruple their retail price – making them a resoundingly successful fashion/film collab for the brand and the studio. The fans, however, couldn't help but notice a colossal manufacturing oversight: Ripley's iconic shoes were only made in men's sizes.

"Girls have always liked horror. What girl didn't grow up and want to be like Ripley?" says goth fashion mogul and entrepreneur Micheline Pitt. "They've always liked monster movies, they've always liked horror movies, but they've never been allowed to have a space in that world and I think that finally, it's changed so much."

And she would know. The world she's referring to, that of genre-inspired clothing for fans, has largely been limited to the unofficial uniform of the archetypal horror buff – the ubiquitous black printed T-shirt – for far too long. Identifying an underserved market that she counted herself among, Pitt turned gross oversight into girlboss opportunity with the 2016 launch of her brand *Vixen*, a collection that fused vintage glamour with monster love. The following year, she set her eyes on equally ghoulish but decidedly less colourful fare, partnering with her overseas production coordinator Lynh Haaga for the eerie-but-elegant goth line, *La Femme En Noir*.

"I think what differentiates La Femme from other goth brands is that we do try to make sure that it is feminine, and it does have that element of sophistication," explains Haaga, to which Pitt elaborates: "It's what I always felt was missing in that world, especially after Lip Service stopped being a company. They really filled that gap of higher-end, elevated, fashion-forward goth fashion, for all the different subgenres of goth itself. I am not a 'mall goth,' I'm older, and I want something that's more elevated. I want something that's got lace and velvet and is elegant and sexy but also dark."

Pitt hadn't detected a gap in the horror merch industry so much as a yawning chasm. From monster-printed pin-up dresses to spiderweb circle skirts, Vixen was an instant hit on the convention circuit, with event-exclusive releases that drew massive lineups of female fans to its vendor booth. For La Femme En Noir, what started as a passion project between friends soon blossomed like a bloodstain on linen into high-level partnerships and lucrative licensing collabs for both brands with some of horror's biggest



properties, including *Sleepy Hollow*, *It*, *Corpse Bride*, and an upcoming *Crimson Peak* line.

"I can't just say yes to something because I think it'll make us money," asserts Pitt, who keeps a list of dream horror movie collabs that includes *The Shape of Water*, *Jennifer's Body*, and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* at the top. "I want to say yes because I love it, and I have appreciated this [property] for years. I think it takes a certain understanding of the property to really do a deep dive and figure out what people want and what

they love about it."

Indeed, a discerning eye reveals that there's more to fashionable fanwear than a simple logo emblazoned across the front, as evidenced by these meticulously detailed collections. Inspired by costuming and colour palettes rather than poster art or stylized text, La Femme's pieces pick up on the aesthetic sensibilities of the films rather than pulling images from them directly, turning them into wearable works of art.

"We find the costumes in movies inspiring as

"LET'S BE HONEST,
HORROR HAS
ALWAYS BEEN
FOCUSED ON
THE FEMALE
EXPERIENCE."

— MICHELINE PITT



heck, so we did take a lot (literally) from *Sleepy Hollow*; the iconic looks of that particular costume designer but also spin it in a way where we make it our own," explains Haaga, using their best-selling pumpkin handbag from the Gothic monochrome line as an example. "That's not something that's in the movie, but we took it literally as the pumpkin head and then turned it into a wearable piece."

Translating horror movie magic into haute couture requires a process, which begins with multiple movie screenings and sketching ses-

sions before moving onto garment design. While some licensing agreements come with strict branding parameters and red tape, most are happy to let Pitt and Haaga work their magic to revitalize a property that has only ripened in the hearts of fans.

"Every studio is different," says Pitt. "Some studios are very strict: 'Here's the exact Pantones; here's the exact art you have to use; here's the exact everything.' We still find ways to create unique pieces that way but with Paramount it was just like, 'Go for it, do your thing.'"

We were the first time they ever made [*Sleepy Hollow*] product since the movie came out. McFarland Toys were the only thing that came out for that film, that was it."

Adds Haaga: "I think that fashion is a very accessible form of art that you can translate a lot of characters that people love and they want to wear it, they want to be close to that particular asset or license. Like when you're wearing our little Pennywise bag around, people know that's a fan of that movie."

As if rising from the ashes of the Reebok debacle, last April saw the launch of another licensed *Alien* collab, only with a decidedly feminine touch. From xenomorph-print bodycon dresses to biomech-inspired sunglasses as well as several pieces for men, La Femme En Noir ensured that this time, no fan went unconsidered.

"Let's be honest, horror has always been focused on the female experience," says Pitt. "We are the stars, we are the victims, we are final girl, we're often the main character, but we're not given a space to exist in this world very often. I don't think that guys have ever taken a step back and said, 'Holy shit, every movie we love is almost all women, or focused on female characters, but we've never made spaces for these women to be with us and talk about it and let them be part of the community.' I think that it's really important that people realize that this is a long time coming." 🧐

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LONDON CALLING

LAST NIGHT IN SOHO

Starring Thomasin McKenzie, Anya Taylor-Joy and Matt Smith

Directed by Edgar Wright

Written by Edgar Wright and Krysty Wilson-Cairns

Focus Features

No matter how silly things got in *Shaun of the Dead*, *Hot Fuzz* and *The World's End*, Edgar Wright's love and respect for the genres he was upending always shone through. That enthusiasm is there in spades in *Last Night in Soho*; the director's first serious-toned horror-thriller is in love with the craft of cinema, and from the very first scene, it's alive in a way so few movies are these days.

Last Night in Soho is also gloriously, contagiously infatuated with London of the '60s, and so is Eloise (Thomasin McKenzie), a modern small-town girl who heads to that city to seek her fortune as a fashion design student. Fleeing the mean (and more sophisticated) girls at her dorm, she rents a top-floor flat from landlady Miss Collins

(the late, great Diana Rigg) that provides a conduit to the era she adores. When she goes to bed at night, she is transported to the Swinging Sixties, where she encounters (becomes?) Sandy (Anya Taylor-Joy), a young woman with an equally passionate fervour for a singing career.

At first, all is glamorous and swoony, but as Sandy becomes consumed by her desired milieu, with Eloise along for the ride, its dark side begins to show, and Eloise becomes fixated on Sandy's increasingly unfortunate circumstances during her waking hours as well. Wright works up some extravagantly scary, powerfully chilling set pieces in the second half, and throughout, McKenzie and Taylor-Joy perform a remarkable dance of dual identities. Rigg, Terence Stamp, and Rita Tushingham provide direct, welcome links to the period *Last Night in Soho* celebrates, and the film has been smashingly well done on every level. In particular, and appropriately given its heroines' passions, Odile Dicks-Mireaux's costumes and the soundtrack of vintage tunes are (literally) to die for.

MICHAEL GINGOLD



GET THEE BEHIND ME

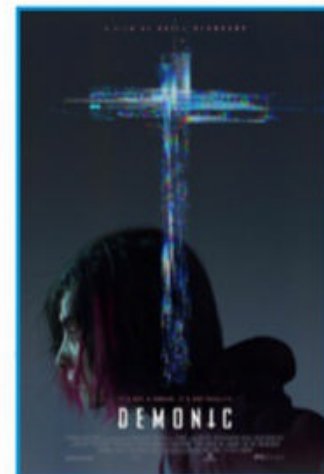
DEMONIC

Starring Carly Pope, Chris William Martin and Nathalie Bolt

Written and directed by Neill Blomkamp
IFC Films

Accusing the filmmaker behind *District 9* of a failure of imagination seems like heresy. That film – for which I, full disclosure, provided a quote for its DVD release – was an actual work of genius. And yet Neill Blomkamp's first full-length excursion into sci-fi horror, *Demonic*, does fail, on almost every level.

Canadian actress Carly Pope, who has co-starred in a number of recent Blomkamp short films, plays, ahem, Carly, whose incarcerated mother Angela (Nathalie Bolt, *District 9*) went on a killing spree years ago. Now, she has been summoned to the mysterious Therapol Institute, where Angela is in a coma. The scientists there offer Carly the chance to enter her mother's imagination and communicate with her; an offer she only reluctantly accepts given her hatred for the woman.



Not surprisingly, Therapol's true motivations are less than benign. In reality, they are a group of Vatican-funded priests determined to destroy the demon inhabiting Angela – the one that motivated her murderous rampage – and they don't hesitate to use Carly as bait for the malevolent being.

Demonic wears its inspirations – *The Cell*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and *The Exorcist* – pretty plainly on its threadbare sleeves. But unlike those films, there is no engaging back story, no likeable characters, and only a few memorable images, let alone scares. The whole Catholic demon hit squad concept is woefully underplayed, and the demon pursuing Carly, while benefitting from some mildly creepy creature design, remains enigmatic, as does its interest in Angela's daughter. Speaking of Carly, Pope is an adequate actor but she lacks the gravitas of Blomkamp regular Sharlto Copley's Wikus from *District 9*, despite being in as desperate a situation.

Blomkamp can do sci-fi horror (see his Oats Studios short *Zygote* for proof) but *Demonic* can go to the Devil, and not in a good way.

SEAN PLUMMER

RETURN TO JERUSALEM'S LOT

CHAPELWAITE

Starring Adrien Brody, Emily Hampshire and Jennifer Ens
Directed by Burr Steers, Rachel Leiterman et al.
Written by Peter Filardi, Jason Filardi et al.
Epix

Successfully expanding a Stephen King short story into a two-hour feature has eluded many a filmmaking team, so turning his 30-something-page "Jerusalem's Lot" into a ten-episode series would seem an especially daunting prospect. Creators/show-runners Peter Filardi (*The Craft*) and Jason Filardi have tackled the challenge by marrying the rural Gothic creep of King's tale with up-to-date themes.

The title refers to the ancestral, ominous new home of Captain Charles Boone (Adrien Brody), which looms on the out-

skirts of the small Maine town of Preacher's Corners. As the widowed sea captain arrives at the manse, he's joined by his three children. Given the Boone family's dark history, the repressive residents of Preacher's Corners are none too happy to see Charles move into Chapelwaite, and his mixed-race brood only earns him more scorn. The only local on his side is Rebecca Morgan (Emily Hampshire), a forward-thinking writer (also new to this adaptation) who volunteers to be Charles' governess. As they struggle against the townspeople's intolerance, Charles is also directly confronted with the frightening Boone legacy, which manifests in nightmares and more corporeal threats.

Chapelwaite's horror content hews quite closely to King's original, and the series is rich and dripping with foreboding, eerie atmosphere. (This latest King TV project also becomes a kind of stylistic prequel to the very first one, Tobe Hooper's two-part *Salem's Lot*, with undead ghouls looming ominously outside windows.) The added themes of prejudice and patriarchy give the proceedings extra dramatic juice, albeit occasionally leaning a bit too heavily into metaphor for recent political issues. Holding it all together is Brody, his haunted visage expressing many different kinds of inner and outer torment as he confronts supernatural threats, the evil that men do, and the demons of his own mind.

MICHAEL GINGOLD



The Last Matinee

EAT YOUR EYES OUT

THE LAST MATINEE

Starring Luciana Grasso, Ricardo Islas and Julieta Spinelli
Directed by Maximiliano Contenti
Written by Maximiliano Contenti and Manuel Facal
Darkstar Pictures

Rather than trying to bury its *giallo* influences, Uruguay's *The Last Matinee* puts them front and centre; at one point, even going so far as featuring a poster of Dario Argento's *Opera* in the background of the climactic confrontation between the black-gloved killer, Come Ojos ("Eats Eyes"; played by Ricardo Islas) and final girl Ana (Luciana Grasso).

Set entirely within the confines of a stylish yet rundown '90s movie theatre, the film opens with the killer's arrival, tracked by *Zodiac*-inspired aerial shots of his car's progress through the rainy city. Most of the first act consists of introductions to his various victims-to-be, as they settle into their seats for a late-night

screening of *Frankenstein: Day of the Beast* (an actual 2011 film coincidentally directed by Ricardo Islas, Come Ojos himself)

We are introduced to Ana, an engineering student and the caring daughter of the theatre's regular projectionist, who is oblivious to the fact that the moviegoers below are being taken out one-by-one by Come Ojos, turning her calm night of studying in between changing the film



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THIS ISSUE: LANCE HITS THE (DIS)LIKE BUTTON

ATTENTION BORE



ICRIME

Breaking Glass Pictures

I loathe everything about social media – I'm not on Facebook, I don't Tweet, TikTok, or courier pigeon. And nothing grinds my gears more than Instagram influencers and YouTube vloggers; I don't care what you had for breakfast, and I don't want to hear what you're being paid to pretend to like! So I'll admit I was kind of into this film about a girl who travels to Hollywood to make it big but winds up in a mystery about an annoying vlogger who disappeared and may have been snuffed out in a snuff movie. Despite its flaws, *iCrime* is an interesting look into the demented mind of vloggers and their willingness to do anything for attention, and it's filled with actors you'll absolutely love to hate. Don't agree with this review? Leave me a smoke signal, maybe I'll get back to you someday.

BODY COUNT: 1

BEST DRINKING GAME: A shot every time someone holds up a videotape.

I SPIT ON YOUR FEED



#FROMJENNIFER

Sector 5

Jennifer's day starts out pretty bad when she gets fired from her role in a low-budget horror movie, but things go from bad to worse when her ex leaks their sex tape and her agent is forced to drop her. Clearly, the only way to regain relevance and respect is to become "internet famous," so our intrepid heroine decides to become an influencer vigilante who punishes the scum who make revenge porn. After hiring a hulking, dim-witted henchman (a wonderful performance by Derek Mears, who played Jason Voorhees in the 2009 *Friday the 13th* reboot), Jennifer hatches a plan to drug her victims and force them to commit sex acts on each other while she tapes it all. Turns out *#FromJennifer* is a surprisingly hilarious black comedy that's fun to watch if you don't mind a lot of shaky camerawork and more dead vloggers than you can shake a GoPro at.

BODY COUNT: 9

BEST DRINKING GAME: A shot every time someone says, "A Jenny is a female donkey."

A SLOG OF A VLOG



THE CHANGING OF BEN MOORE

Sector 5

Poor Ben has been having a hard time lately. He's been losing his memory, never feels hungry, has started sleepwalking, and can't explain why he sometimes wakes up covered in blood. Instead of seeking psychiatric help, Ben decides to start documenting his problems on video because that's how people solve their issues these days. This means we are subjected to the banal minutia of Ben's life – arguments with his girlfriends, his lame-ass friends, and his incredible ineptitude at actually dealing with his problems – especially when his pals and neighbourhood pets start turning up dead. Is Ben possessed, a vampire, a werewolf, or a whiny little bitch? Though the last ten seconds of this movie show some promise, the remaining hour, 29 minutes and 50 seconds are rife with head-slapping stupidity. Do yourself a favour and go get vaccinated instead of watching *The Changing of Ben Moore*. Even a blood clot would be a better outcome!

BODY COUNT: 3 (plus a dog and a cat)

BEST DRINKING GAME: A shot every time someone stops or starts a camera.

LAST CHANCE LANCE

reels into a nightmarish fight to the death with the killer.

A patient and atmospheric horror film with a Goblin-esque score, *The Last Matinee's* high production value extends to its gore budget as well, with some creative yet classic kills. While it may not have anything particularly new to contribute to the wider giallo subgenre, the film undoubtedly succeeds as a homage to Italian horror transposed into a Spanish-language and South American setting. With its not-so-subtle tips of the hat to its influences, *The Last Matinee* is sure to win over slasher aficionados.

GRACE DETWILER

HORRORS OF MARTIAL LAW

DETENTION

Starring Gingle Wang, Meng-Po Fu and Jing-Hua Tseng

Directed by John Hsu

Written by John Hsu, Lyra Fu and Shih-Keng Chien

Dekanalog

Movies based on video games are rarely as ambitious in their themes and storytelling as *Detention*, a Taiwanese frightfest based on the Red Candle Games hit (which also inspired last year's Netflix series). In fact, it has the feel of a film with a literary source, given the political trappings and emphasis on rebellion via reading.

Coming to U.S. theatres and virtual cinemas October 8, *Detention* is set in 1962 during Taiwan's White Terror period of martial law, when those suspected of opposing the Chinese Nationalist party were persecuted, and reading even left-wing books was punishable by death. At Greenwood High School, a small group of students rebel by taking part in a secret book club, with the tacit approval of a couple of teachers. The tension of the risks they run is exacerbated when the paranormal begins creeping into Greenwood, and one of the club, Ray-Shin Fang (Gingle Wang), first experiences it via brief and vividly scary visions in an auditorium.

With its shifts in time and points of view, the first half hour of *Detention* can be a little hard to follow, though it makes points forcefully and the milieu is persuasively established by writer/director John Hsu and co-scripters Lyra Fu and Shih-Keng Chien. When one of the club is killed by a spindly creature in military dress, *Detention* plunges into full nightmare territory – before the movie jumps back in time to reveal more about Fang and her specific personal reasons to oppose the authorities. The filmmakers weave a complex web of fraught interpersonal connections among the young people secretly striving for any kind of freedom, and the teachers attempting to serve both their masters and their moralities. Yet the fact that this is a human story first and a horror story second in no way diminishes its impact in the latter area.

MICHAEL GINGOLD



REDDIT AND FORGET IT

BEHEMOTH

Starring Josh Eisenberg, Paul Statman
and Jennifer Churchich
Directed by Peter Szewczyk
Written by Derrick Ligas and Peter Szewczyk
Level 33 Entertainment

When a mysterious toxin renders his young daughter deathly ill, Joshua (Josh Eisenberg) quits his job at the chemical company which he feels is responsible and becomes a whistle-blowin' warrior. This largely translates to browsing Reddit boards about conspiracy theories, ignoring his wife's phone calls, and neglecting to visit his daughter in the hospital until Joshua and his friends protest an event sponsored by his former employer. After a series of plot contrivances, they kidnap company man Luis Woeland (Paul Statman) and take him to a motel, determined to get answers that he may or may not actually have.

Behemoth boasts a whopping 400-plus effect shots, courtesy of visual effects company Light + Mathematics. Gore, creature design, stunts, and more are on the menu, and while this movie won't be mistaken for an Industrial Light & Magic production any time soon, the CGI works surprisingly well, especially considering the obvious low budget.

Unfortunately, 400-plus effects shots alone do not a compelling movie make, and *Behemoth* suffers during...well, everything else. The socio-political commentary of the corporate malfeasance story is undone by the unfocused script. The pace is leaden at times, as we, like Woeland, are

held captive in that motel room for what seems like hours as Joshua makes weak threats and barks variations of "Tell me what I want to know!" repeatedly. Moments meant to relay high drama – or even low drama, to be fair – are undone by the decidedly indie-level acting.

Despite its shortcomings, though, it can't be denied that *Behemoth* is a scrappy, ambi-



Behemoth

tious movie, evoking strains of *Resident Evil*, *DOOM*, and even *The Witch* on a dollar budget. Szewczyk's reach surely exceeds his grasp, but there's something to be said for his creature-feature moxie. It's filmmaking of the "throw everything at the wall" variety, but hey, some of it sticks.

STACIE PONDER

ANY WITCH WAY

WITCHES OF BLACKWOOD

Starring Cassandra Magrath, John Voce
and Francesca Waters
Directed by Kate Whitbread
Written by Darren Markey
High Octane Pictures

Witches have been having their moment in horror cinema as of late, thanks in large part to the financial and critical success of *The Witch* in 2015. Eggers' film, much like Rob Zombie's *The Lords of Salem*, did much to change the usual trajectory for cinematic witches: instead of being punished for their witchy ways, these women found personal autonomy and freedom from societal expectations as they floated up to the sky or, you know, did some demon-birth performance art in an opera house full of cultists. A

new Australian entry to the subgenre, *Witches of Blackwood*, oscillates between punishing and empowering the titular witches, as if the filmmakers aren't sure which, if any, moral path to follow.

Claire (Cassandra Magrath, *Wolf Creek*) is taking a leave of absence from her police job after her attempts at helping a suicidal man go horribly wrong. After she receives news that her father has been found dead in the forest, Claire returns to her hometown of Blackwood to clean out his house. She is haunted by her pasts, both professional and personal, through invasive memories of her deceased mother as well as the man she couldn't save. Blackwood itself is also troubling, as women wander aimlessly-yet-sinisterly, all hollow-eyed and sallow-complected. And where are all the men? And the babies?

Witches of Blackwood attempts to keep things mysterious, but mostly we're just watching Claire slowly come to the same conclusions the audience did early on. There are details to be sorted about her story, but very few surprises –



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ON THE SLAB: HAUNTINGS FOR HALLOWEEN!

BLOOD RUNS DOWN

17:27 mins/ Vimeo via Zandashé Brown's channel

The haunted house is a classic source of fear for children, an avatar of the ominous unknown. But for Ana (Farrah Martin), the little girl at the centre of Zandashé Brown's Southern Gothic tale, that fear is amplified by the fact that it's not some strange house that's haunted, but her own mother (Idella Johnson). Brown weaves two narrative threads into one film: one that dwells in the dread that manifests when those we rely on for protection suddenly become a threat, and the other that explores the melancholy experience of realizing our parents' vulnerability and humanity for the first time. What's particularly interesting about *Blood Runs Down* is that Brown uses the same characters to bring both stories together into a beautifully sad contemplation of loss.



NOT ALONE IN HERE

6:18 mins/YouTube via ponysmasher

Everyone has had to devise ways to pass the time during the COVID pandemic lockdown, and it's not too surprising that directors like David F. Sandberg, who brought us *Lights Out* and *Annabelle: Creation*, spent his downtime scratching a creative itch on a smaller scale. In the case of *Not Alone in Here*, Sandberg once again enlisted the services of his wife Lotta Losten, who stars as a solitary woman grappling with whether or not someone (or something) is lurking in her house. It's a surprisingly lively short, given its small scale and brief runtime, but quick cuts give the film a kinetic feel and Losten's narration gives a meta, self-aware vibe to the proceedings. Sandberg might have made it to the big leagues, but he still knows when to let shots linger to ramp up tension for a genuinely creepy payoff in a small space.

THE HAUNTING OF POTTERSFIELD

8:01 mins/YouTube via Alter

Andre Dixon's *The Haunting of Pottersfield* is a perfect short for those haunted house purists who like their doors squeaky, their floors creaky, and their unquiet spirits cranky. When two paranormal investigators (Erin Beute and Erik Grey) wake up in the middle of a mysterious mansion with no recollection of how they got there, things quickly take a turn for the horrific as malevolent entities stalk the pair. There's a lot of dread packed into a tight eight minutes, including a grimy hulk of a caretaker (Chad Alan Crenshaw) and one pissed-off lady of the house (Lori Katz). But the star of the show is Dixon's use of sound design, as the various whispers, groans, and (of course) screams immerse the viewer in this wretched mansion along with those unlucky investigators.



BRYAN CHRISTOPHER

which is surprising in itself, considering her flashbacks to forest ceremonies and seeming bewitchment by her rune necklace. A generous read would call this a film about (ahem) *hereditary* mental illness and trauma and how we might break the patterns, but witchficionados will likely just call it business as usual.

STACIE PONDER

KARATE FLOP

PRISONERS OF THE GHOSTLAND

Starring Nicolas Cage, Sofia Boutella and Bill Moseley

Directed by Sion Sono

Written by Aaron Hendry and Reza Sixo Safai

RLJE Films

On paper, Nicolas Cage and Sion Sono, the Japanese mastermind behind outré films like *Suicide Club* and *Why Don't You Play in Hell?*, sound like a match made in heavenly hell, one that should bring us to untold heights of what-the-fuck-ery. In Sono's majority-English-language debut *Prisoners of the Ghostland*, however, both actor and director are surprisingly tame.

Cage stars as "Hero," a notorious criminal promised freedom if he can find The Governor's (Bill "Chop Top" Moseley) missing granddaughter Bernice (Sofia Boutella, *Climax*) and bring her home. To complicate matters, Hero is locked into a leather suit rigged with explosives. If he gets violent with or aroused by Bernice, or takes too long to find her, he'll lose his arms, his down-below, or maybe even his life. Hero follows a lead to Ghostland, a post-apocalyptic rubble-filled ruin where the downtrodden are trapped at the mercy of a curse.

Road Warrior meets *Escape From New York* meets Cage and Sono should be the formula for a perfect gonzo midnight movie, but while *Prisoners of the Ghostland* is never exactly dull, it's oddly lethargic. Cage feels inauthentic here, as if he's playing at audience expectations of him rather than simply being himself. It's a fine distinction, but lines like "I'll karate chop you! Hi-fucking-yah!" come off as an inorganic grab for *The Wicker Man*'s "Not the bees!" levels of memehood more than anything else.

There are hints at greater themes and the long shadows of the atomic age loom large, but there's also a whiff of parody throughout. Sono has crafted a world imbued with the artificial and theatrical, whether it's Samurai Town with its cowboys, geishas, and samurai, or Ghostland with its singing citizenry, rusted pipe architecture, and big rigs lit up like carnival rides. But those big rigs never move or leave the parking lot; like *Prisoners of the Ghostland* itself, they're pretty cool to look at, but mostly they're just unrealized potential.

STACIE PONDER





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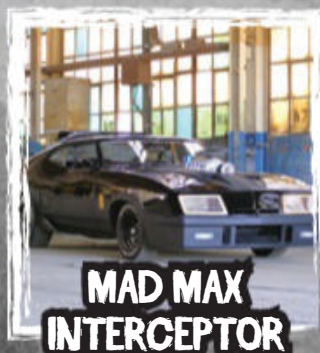
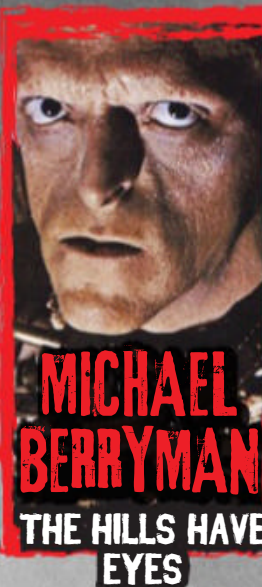
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We Need To Do Something

POWDER TOMB

WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING

Starring Sierra McCormick, Vinessa Shaw and Pat Healy
Directed by Sean King O'Grady
Written by Max Booth III
IFC Midnight

It generally doesn't take an apocalypse to fracture a dysfunctional family, but it certainly helps in *We Need To Do Something*.

Director Sean King O'Grady's adaptation of Max Booth III's novella stars Sierra McCormick (VFW) as Melissa, a disaffected teen trapped with her parents and little brother in their ensuite bathroom when what appears to be a hurricane lodges an unmovable tree against the door. Without food or much hope of rescue, the fami-

ly's fault lines become deeper and starker: dad Robert (Pat Healy, *Velvet Buzzsaw*) is a blustery tough guy who falls apart in the face of disaster; mom Diane (Vinessa Shaw, *The Hills Have Eyes*) is the family rock, reassuring everyone that everything will be all right, until it isn't; and Melissa may or may not have brought about the end of the world thanks to a spell gone wrong cast by her and her witch girlfriend Amy (Lisette Alexis).

Micro-budget indies that mostly take place in a single location are often boring; thankfully, O'Grady is a deft hand at ratcheting up the very believable tensions within this fucked-up family unit. Small (and therefore, in-

expensive) dramatic elements – a dog (that isn't a dog) that we hear but never see; a rattlesnake; a disembodied tongue – propel the story even as the claustrophobia becomes increasingly unbearable. Humour, too, makes the dark tone palatable, such as when Melissa gets pee shy in front of her family.

Certain story elements are confusing upon first viewing – like exactly why Amy's original spell went awry – but these small quibbles are unimportant in the face of O'Grady's ability to craft an intimate family drama with supernatural elements on less than what a bigger production would spend on a day's craft services.

SEAN PLUMMER



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Habit

BAR NUN

HABIT

Starring Bella Thorne, Gavin Rossdale and Libby Mintz

Directed by Janell Shirtcliff

Written by Janell Shirtcliff and Libby Mintz
Lionsgate

Habit is a raucous debut feature from actress/fashion photographer Janell Shirtcliff. Though the delightful opening credits take pains to point out that the film was written by two young women (Shirtcliff and Libby Mintz, who also stars), viewers might struggle throughout the 80-minute runtime to believe it wasn't actually written by a 50-year-old dude in an ironic Millennial T-shirt.

The film follows Mads (Bella Thorne), a Je-

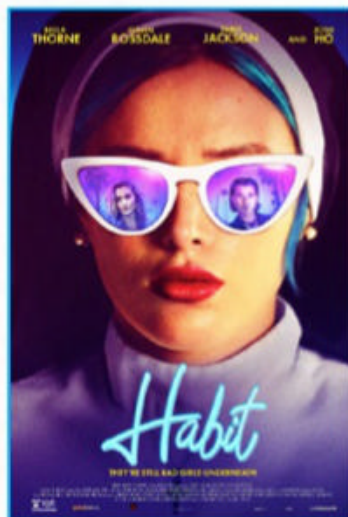
sus-obsessed party girl and her two friends, Evie (Mintz) and Addy (Andreja Pejic), on a sex-and-substance fuelled odyssey through L.A. Shortly after a washed-up TV actor (Gavin Rossdale) entrusts Mads with some drugs to sell, they're stolen by one of Evie's hookups. The girls avoid the wrath of the big boss dealer (Hong Kong star Josie Ho in a Ronnie Spector wig) by impersonating nuns and recouping the cash.

Everything in *Habit* is caked on – the garish costumes and hair styling, the baroquely overwritten script, and each heightened performance that reaches for John Waters' *Hairspray* but ends up more John Travolta in the *Hairspray* remake. Simply put, doing gross stuff and saying shocking things are

not inherently funny or interesting, especially when you don't understand why they're gross or shocking. Amidst all the sex, drugs, rock and roll, and "Christianophobic" blasphemy (as one online petition against the film put it), there are lines like "They can all suck my Jesus dick," and "We've gotta work to destabilize the patriarchal norms entrenched into this society that have caused so much gender inequality."

Like so many modern products of pop culture, *Habit* is desperate to shock, but terrified to offend. The film that results from such fundamentally incompatible drives neither shocks nor offends... and neither does it entertain.

RYAN COLEMAN



WITH ORIGINAL MOVIE DIRECTOR VINCENZO NATALI SERVING AS EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, YASUHIKO SHIMIZU'S JAPANESE **CUBE** REMAKE TAKES THE STORY BACK TO SQUARE ONE



BY ANDREA SUBISSATI

JAPANESE FILMMAKER YASUHIKO SHIMIZU WAS ONLY A TEENAGER WHEN A FRIEND RECOMMENDED THAT HE CHECK OUT **CUBE**, the low-budget Canadian indie flick that sees six people suddenly awakening in a giant cube complex set with deadly traps. Procuring a copy of the 1997 tape was something of a challenge in rural Japan, but the film definitely made an impact on the young man, whose remake of the title is set for release this October.

"I was living in a countryside in Japan," he recalls, "so I cycled for a long time and went to the rental shop and desperately went there and watched it and I felt like this was something really new and it changed something in [my perspective] of film."

Inspired by **Cube**'s inventive violence and high-concept take on survivalism in the technological age, Shimizu couldn't help but imagine how a more tech-savvy Japanese generation might fare amid the lethal puzzle box's many deadly snares and complex mathematical clues. Like Vincenzo Natali's original film, Shimizu's *Cube* is fundamentally a story about human tensions that simmer and boil over in the face of calamity.

"When I watched it in high school, I did feel like this film can be different," explains Shimizu. "By the generation first of all, and also the country, what nation would be in the Cube. That actually changes the reaction of the people because it's a more cultural thing than a human thing."

Indeed, this narrative tweak makes for significant thematic changes to the story. This *Cube*'s unwilling human lab rats include Ando (Kôtarô Yoshida), a middle-aged corporate executive whose disdain for the lazy oncoming generation has him at odds with the working class Millennials of

the group, Shinji (Masaki Okada) and Yuichi (Hikaru Tashiro). Meanwhile, the dogmatic Ide (Takumi Saitoh), mysterious Asako (Anne Watanabe), and youngster Chiharu (Masaki Suda) each have their own motivations for escaping the Cube – and their own apprehensions about what might lie beyond it. The result is a film that's as thrilling as it is contemplative and philosophical.

The emphasis on the nature of intergenerational Japanese conflict, however, does not come at the cost of jaw-dropping violence. Like the original film's unforgettable opener where genre darling Julian Richings gets, ahem, cubed by a grid of razor wire, Shimizu's remake sets the stage with a similarly impressive kill scene, "to show the beauty of the Cube," as he puts it. Audiences can expect to behold this beauty by way of spinning fan blades, tangles of needles, sophisticated laser sensors, and what can only be described as human bonsai.

For this new spate of nasty escape rooms from hell, Shimizu was aided by Natali, who not only authorized the remake (he was uninvolved with the tepid North American sequels to the original film, 2002's *Cube2: Hypercube*

and 2004's *Cube Zero*), but also gave the director a couple of tips.

"He is a creative advisor and he has a credit," says Shimizu of Natali, who was consulted frequently throughout the remake's development. "I wanted to make a film that Vincenzo really likes, but not exactly the same. I respect his creativity, first of all. He gave me some ideas like, 'Oh, I wanted to do this, so maybe you can use this for the Japanese version,' and things like that. We had such exchanges and I wanted to do something that [Natali] couldn't do for the original." 🍷



REISSUED & REANIMATED

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD



FRIGHTENING 4K

When the 4K UHD format launched five years ago, offering the sharpest and clearest images yet on the disc landscape, it was with the expected round of big-budget mainstream features from the major studios. Since then, a number of current horror titles have taken the ultra-high-definition plunge, and more recently, vintage independent and foreign fright fare has begun creeping onto the roster. This Halloween season offers an especially strong crop of favourite titles getting visual/aural upgrades, starting with five of the films that turned the holiday into a franchise.

On September 28, Shout! Factory releases John Carpenter's *Halloween* and its first four sequels in UHD/Blu-ray combo packs under its Scream Factory banner. The rights to the first, fourth and fifth in the Michael Myers saga had previously been owned by Anchor Bay, which was acquired by Lionsgate in 2016; when Shout! discovered that those rights were expiring, they swooped in to pick them up, allowing them to reissue the full quintet.

"From everything we could find, [previous releases of the film] looked like they just scanned

an interpositive," says Shout!'s Cliff MacMillan.

"So our first concern was, we had to go back to the original negative, and did it still exist? In fact, it did, so we scanned the camera negative in 16-bit 4K resolution, and we got [cinematographer] Dean Cundey to come in and examine it, and make a couple of tweaks. It looks very much like the 35th-anniversary edition, because that's the way Dean said it should look. That was the [version] where Dean went in and changed it, because on the earlier discs, somebody had tried to make everything look brown, because the movie takes

place in the fall. But that's not the way it was shot, so Dean coloured it the way it looked when it was first filmed."

The Shout! team similarly went back to the source for the sequels.

"For 4 and 5, it took a little work, but we found the original negatives, and we scanned those also in 16-bit 4K," says MacMillan. "For II and III, at the time we did 4K scans for our Steelbook Editions, Technicolor would not allow us to touch the original camera negatives. So for these releases, Universal went

to Technicolor and said, 'No, we want the original camera negatives,' and Technicolor turned them over."

The TV re-edit of *Halloween* has also been retransferred from NBC's recently found master, and all five movies sport new Dolby Atmos soundtracks, plus a bunch of bonus features largely ported over from the Blu-ray boxed set released by Shout! and Anchor Bay in 2014.

MacMillan notes that it was tough to come up with new extras, but they were able to add a few new goodies: "We found the original opening for *Halloween 5*, the scenes with Dr. Death," he says. "The audio was missing and the actor who originally played Dr. Death passed away, so we brought in Sean Whalen from *The People Under the Stairs* to voice him. That's the big extra, because people have been wanting to see that forever. We also found some MPAA-deleted frames from *Halloween 5*."

Another maniac is making his way to UHD this fall: the butcher in blue of *Maniac Cop 2* and *3*, arriving from Blue Underground October 19. Having already brought Lucio Fulci's *Zombie* and *The House by the Cemetery*, his own *Maniac*, and others to 4K disc, BU's William Lustig welcomed the opportunity to do the



honours on *Cop 2*, which he considers his best movie, and *Cop 3*, which is... more problematic. Serious creative differences between Lustig, producer Joel Soisson and screenwriter Larry Cohen led the director to depart the film, with Soisson overseeing its completion.

"I had always avoided watching *Maniac Cop 3*; it was kind of a painful period of my life," Lustig says. "But it was funny; I looked at it again and was thinking, 'You know, there are some good scenes in this movie!' But because I didn't finish it, other scenes weren't completed the way I wanted them. So [for the new release] I started, little by little, adding stuff that I'd always intended to be there. I put in visual effects that were missing, I did some wire removal, sound effects, and other things. I'm not going to call it a director's cut, but I guess you could say it's a director's enhancement cut."

Previous editions of *Maniac Cop 3* have carried the common directorial pseudonym "Alan Smith-ee," but the new UHD and accompanying Blu-ray mark the first time that Smithee has done an audio commentary. Lustig explains: "Some people think that I left the movie in anger, and actually, Joel and I never really had a falling out as professionals. So I had this idea that we should do an audio commentary, talking about what went on, [and call it a Smithee commentary] because we consider ourselves, as a team, to be Alan Smithee. It's very candid, and I think people will get a kick out of it, since it's not your run-of-the-mill commentary. A lot of those can either be silly, or just the director telling you what you're seeing. We really get into it, you know?"

Synapse Films is also revisiting a pair of past favourites on October 19: *Demons* and *Demons 2*, the Lamberto Bava-directed, Dario Argento-produced shockers in which the ferocious title creatures rip their way out of a theatre screen in the first film and a televised movie in the second. The company, which brought Argento's *Suspiria* to 4K in 2019, had previously given the *Demons* duo a standard Blu-ray showcase.

"They are very popular titles for us, so when the opportunity arose, we felt our fans would



Halloween II



Maniac Cop 3

appreciate the upgrades," says Synapse's Don May, Jr. "They are fantastic films, very *Suspiria*-like in their colour schemes; the original versions we released came out nearly nine years ago and were based on very nice, but older transfers. With new advances in technology in restoration, colour and scanning in 4K, these new editions are worth the upgrade for whatever your current home theatre set-up is."

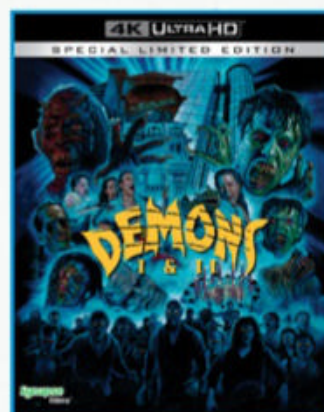
Synapse is releasing the remastered *Demons* duo in both 4K and new standard Blu-ray double features. As the former can hold twice the data of the latter, it contains not only the label's previous extras but a number that are new to North America, plus an exclusive, never-before-released Q&A with make-up effects creator Sergio Stivaletti, recorded at 2019's British Festival of Fantastic Films. However, May believes that the true highlight of the new set is the opportunity to view the movies in sharper, more

colourful states than ever before, allowing for a greater appreciation of Bava's filmmaking.

"There's something about the mixture of colours, sound, gore, and the fantastic practical effects that makes these films timeless," May says, "but watching them all over again, one thing I noticed that I didn't give much thought to

before was the flow of their editing techniques. There are some pretty amazing transitions in both, moving from one shot or scene to the next, that I appreciate now more than ever before. For example, there's the scene in *Demons* where the cop shoots the demon's hand. It blows his hand off with a huge bang, then there's a hard cut

to the teenager's hand unbolting a vent. Great stuff. In *Demons 2*, there's the moment where the camera flash fails in both the apartment and, at the same time, in the movie on the TV, and the actresses in both say the same line of dialogue. It's noticing little things like these that really allow you to appreciate the artistry of the filmmakers."



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CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

Bolonium Pandemonium

by John W. Bowen

One might justifiably sum up the 1980s as the decade that boycotted irony, but cinema was the one sector of the shitegeist back then that arguably qualified as the rule-proving exception. Safe and conservative as music and television may have been in the Mullet Age, it's worth noting that the '80s movie audiences that sent *Dirty Dancing* and *Top Gun* over the top also had a healthy appetite for less blandly digestible fare and, in some cases, as daring as anything from the previous decade. In a near-inexplicable pop culture paradox, this was the decade when mainstream media began noticing John Waters (read: admitting he existed) and Troma had what was then known as an "underground hit" (how quaint that sounds now!) with *The Toxic Avenger*. More tellingly, subversive cinema even had some success in the multiplexes via *Robocop*, *Blue Velvet*, and *Heathers*. Of course, if your '80s movie was a bizarrely plotted poverty row satire on classic horror and science fiction and was also – kiss of death! – unapologetically Canadian, a quick trip to the delete bin was still the most likely scenario.

Now all but forgotten by even the most ardent cultists, *The Big Meat Eater* (1982) is a sci-fi/horror spoof that isn't content with simply sending up hackneyed genre film conventions, because... well, hard to say for sure, but one can't help thinking filmmaker Chris Windsor and his writing partners Phil Savath and Laurence Keane would have deemed that too easy. Maybe that's why the Vancouver-based trio saw fit to toss some commentary on classic Canadian bugaboos into the mix – in particular, our wide-eyed cheerleading of multiculturalism versus our near-pathological unwillingness to realistically address its negative aspects. Oh, and it's also a freakin' musical. (That squeal of delight you just heard in the distance was Andrea Subisati abruptly sitting up and taking notice.) Most of the songs aren't that memorable, or at least not as memorable as they should be, given the plot. Granted, the more-Devo-than-Devo "Mondo Chémico" and "Baghdad Boogie" are significant exceptions.

In the prosaic 1950s Canadian hick town of Bur-



quitlam (bit of a riff for Vancouverites), psychotic Turkish janitor Abdullah (massive jazz trombonist Clarence "Big" Miller – imagine a 300-pound Ossie Davis) murders his boss (Howard Taylor), Burquitlam's corrupt mayor, and hides the body in the walk-in freezer of the local butcher shop. Suddenly unemployed, Abdullah soon finds himself working as assistant to said butcher shop's proprietor, uber-dorky, squeaky-clean Bob Sanderson (George Dawson), who spends his downtime inventing a new language to be spoken at a futuristic theme park that's about to be built. Meanwhile, alien robots hover nearby in their flying saucer, come hither in search of the rare fuel source Bolonium, a large supply of which has evolved in the butcher shop's septic tank. At this juncture, as you've doubtless deduced, shit proceeds to get real.

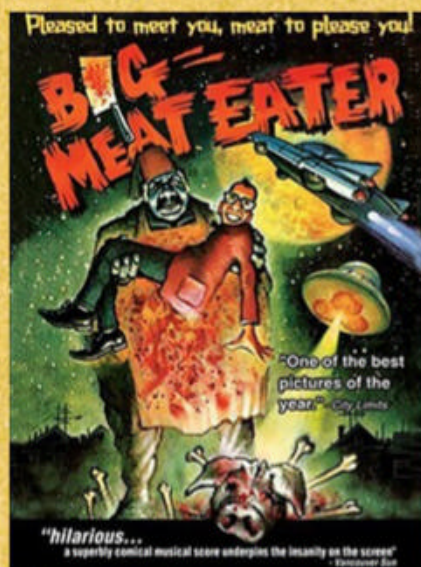
Whether intended as commentary on the immigrant experience or Canada's identity crisis in the '80s (it kind of mutates with each decade but never goes away), *TBME* is also teeming with broad-as-a-free-way cultural stereotypes. Along with Abdullah the bloodthirsty Turk and Burquitlam's Italian mobster

mayor, our cast is rounded out by the Wczinskis, a family of Eastern European immigrants who might be mistaken for Jews one minute and gypsies the next, were it not for their habit of keeping crucifixes handy to brandish at evil entities.

The film's persisting obscurity can't be summed up any more easily than its storyline can, and if I have to explain that plot again, I swear someone's

gonna get punched in the dick. But one thing's for sure: *TBME* doesn't even cater to the expectations of would-be cult film fans. Canuxploitation completists trolling the murky waters of '80s cinema are generally on the lookout for lesser-known slasher fare and raunchy teen comedies, not microbudget oddities that simultaneously send up '50s genre film tropes and Canada's own self-image issues. Not to say they wouldn't enjoy it, but when there's no reason for them to expect that thing even exists, chances are it'll be easy to over-

look, and more's the pity. Need more *TBME* trivia, fawning fandom, and scholarly analysis? Of course you do, so get the hell out of my basement and go invade our boy Paul Corupe's posh maple-scented rec room at Canuxploitation.com. ♥



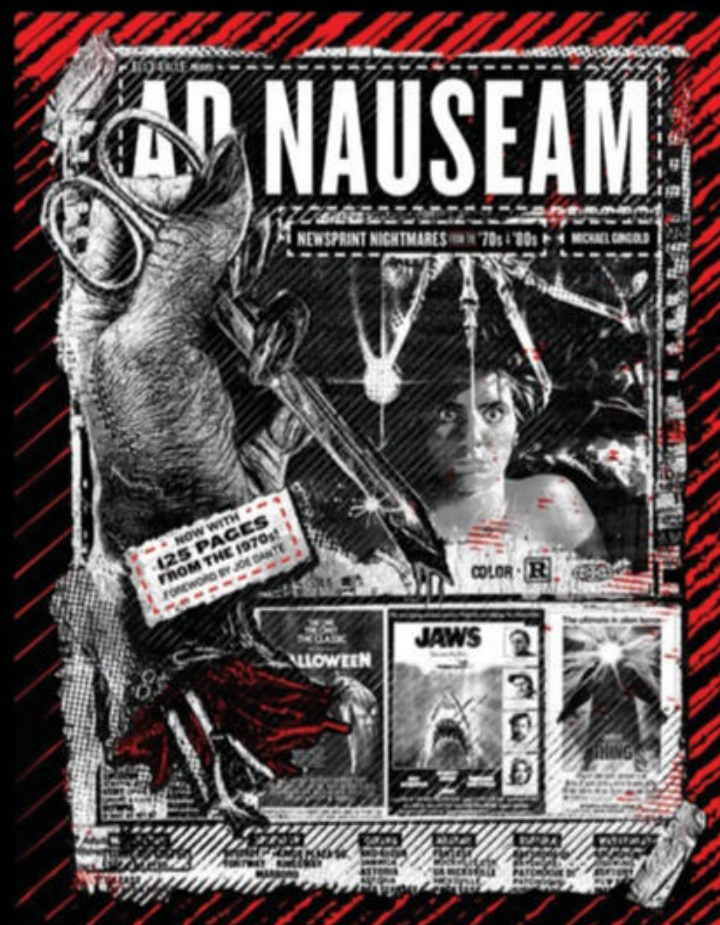
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FILES FROM THE BLACK MUSEUM

THE LONG SHADOWS OF CLASSIC HORROR'S PAST

BY PAUL CORUPE

Only The Lonely

"RECENTLY REISSUED ON BLU-RAY FROM KINO LORBER, *THE LAST MAN ON EARTH* (1964) TAPS INTO SIMILAR ANXIETIES ABOUT HOW WE RELATE TO THE WORLD – NOT ONLY ABOUT BEING ALONE, BUT ALSO ABOUT RECONNECTING WITH PEOPLE."

Fellow introverts rise up! Even the most hardened lockdown holdouts among us will soon have to acknowledge that it's time to brush the cookie crumbs off our sweatpants and brace ourselves for the return to polite society. Though our lonely lockdown days seem mostly behind us, you may be wondering if you're mentally prepared to jump back into in-person socializing – especially if your longest and deepest conversations this past year were with your pets. While looking for new excuses to put off leaving the house, why not catch up with influential horror classic [The Last Man on Earth](#)

(1964)? Recently reissued on Blu-ray from Kino Lorber, this apocalyptic entry taps into similar anxieties about how we relate to the world – not only about being alone, but also about reconnecting with people.

Adapted from Richard Matheson's acclaimed novel *I Am Legend*, *The Last Man on Earth* stars Vincent Price as Dr. Morgan, the lone survivor of a mysterious plague that has ravaged the Earth, turning the population into undead vampire creatures. Apparently immune, Morgan recalls the origins of the disease three years earlier, including rumours that the infected won't stay dead unless their bodies are tossed into a fire pit. As Morgan works with fellow chemist Dr. Ben Cortman (Giacomo Rossi Stuart) to develop a cure, he watches others succumb to the disease, including his wife (Emma Danieli) and young daughter (Christi Courtland), until he's the only one left. Now he searches ruined buildings by day to joylessly stake the vampires as they sleep, and holes up at night when they try to force their way into his house.

Although most of the action in *The Last Man on Earth* centres on Morgan battling the undead mobs, the film seems more concerned with the quieter horror of coming to grips with a solitary existence. "Another day to live through – better get started," Morgan muses as he begins his survival routine – burning bodies, collecting mirrors and garlic cloves from nearby stores, and carving countless wooden stakes. Morgan catalogues these activities meticulously, striking days off a hand-scrawled calendar and notating city schematics with his kill count. Through it all, he projects a grim



sense of hopelessness – it's clear that he'll eventually run out of food and other supplies he needs to carry on.

You can't help but recognize Morgan's dead-eyed stare as he carries out his daily schedule – we've seen that same look reflected in the fatigued faces that pop up in our Zoom meetings and are only half-hidden behind masks at the grocery store. With few in-person events to schedule our time around over the last year, days became repetitious and blended together, taking an unquestionable emotional toll. Our to-do lists may not include fortifying windows for another night of attacks, but they've been just as daunting

to get through during these long pandemic days.

Still, for many, the inevitable return to normalcy sparks its own sense of unease. Morgan struggles with his own conflicted feelings when he discovers that he isn't by himself after all: after befriending a stray dog, he finds Ruth (Franca Bettoia), an apparently normal woman stumbling around in the daylight. But Ruth is actually somewhere in between human and vampire, and Morgan is shocked when she explains that her kind considers *him* a nightmarish creature, and are set on putting an end to his systematic killing spree. This turning point – which asks us to reconsider who the real monsters are – remains the most talked-about aspect of the film. But instead of this twist, or even the loneliness or dangerous zombies, Morgan seems most disturbed by the realization that he can never rejoin the society he once so desperately longed for. Even though he's discovered that he's not the only survivor, he is now more alone than ever.

As our own society opens up and friends and families start to reconnect in person, it's unlikely we'll face the same sort of existential crisis – after all, our pandemic hasn't turned anyone into a bloodsucking zombie. And yet there's no doubt that almost everyone experienced some degree of transformation in this lost, lonely year, as daily routines and social connections were rewired and reconsidered. If it was difficult to adapt to life inside lockdown, we have to acknowledge that it might be just as challenging to transition back outside. In the end, time alone will tell how long it will take for us to truly return to normal. 🧐



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BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

In December 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge in Luxembourg, a small squadron of American soldiers find themselves lost in the woods during a blizzard. Seeking shelter they find an abandoned manor, but dreams of refuge soon turn into endless nightmares for they have entered *The House*.

Written by Phillip Sevy and drawn by Drew Zucker, *The House* started as an idea in Zucker's mind: a strong desire to tell a personal type of story he felt was missing from horror comics, and to marry it with the aesthetics of World War II. Shortly after meeting Sevy in 2010 and discovering a mutual love of horror, he pitched the project.

"It hit all kinds of sweet spots for me," says Sevy. "It was psychological and historical horror; it was a challenge to pull off something in comics form that would require a different approach than if it was done for a movie. In film, you can rely on music for mood and tension, a fixed camera for reveals and thrills – but in comics, you have an entirely different set of techniques to

use. Comics and horror work best with a slow-burn tension that plays with your mind and emotions more than anything."

And playing with mind and emotions is exactly what *The House* does best: once inside the vast abode, the soldiers quickly realize all is not normal. Doors and rooms mysteriously disappear and reappear in other areas, exits can no longer be found, and the house's innards become a labyrinthine mess that's nearly impossible to navigate. The feeling of disorientation and never knowing what lurks around the next corner is conveyed brilliantly by Zucker's art and disorients the reader as much as the characters.

Eventually, however, the house's bizarre geographical layout takes a back seat to the manifestations of the soldiers' fears, and we enter full-blown monster territory. Soon, the soldiers begin experiencing visions that become more and more horrific, sending each to the edge of madness as they confront hidden secrets and fears that threaten to completely engulf them.

Unsurprisingly, many of the men are haunted by the war they've been fighting. Though it's implied the "house" has existed for thousands, if not millions of years, there was never any doubt in the creators' minds about when this story would take place.

"So much of WWII in pop culture is that of the strong soldiers storming across Europe and conquering the Nazis," says Zucker. "The reality of [*The House*] is much different – the men that went to fight were just that, men. Doing something extraordinary doesn't mean you aren't flawed, that's what makes people and characters interesting. It's that conflict of fighting the good fight and still suffering from trauma that we wanted to tap into with these characters."



The House: Historical horror and supernatural spectres collide in this WWII-set story.

Sevy adds an even more sombre layer to the choice of setting: "When we got to the end – when we had 'won' – we found the camps... and the bodies. We found the true horror of what the Nazis had been doing. There was no victory lap at the end; no satisfaction in triumph. So even if/when there is triumph, we know that ultimately they have one of the most horrific events in modern history to still find. It's a bleak and scary thought. *The House* is about escaping the horrors of your past, but setting it during WWII is a constant reminder that you're never able to escape them; you just have to live with them and try to prevent future ones from happening."

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QUICK CUTS

Good witches get a chance to shine for a change in the *Hellboy* universe, within the pages of *Imogen of the Wyrding Way*. With the Second World War imminent, many European countries are seeing a rash of refugees. Many are so desperate they're even willing to seek sanctuary among mountain trolls, who promise them refuge in the forests of Denmark. When Imogen investigates at the behest of a young man whose family has gone missing among the woods, what she finds will test the limits of her emotional resolve, if not her powers. Though part of the larger "Tales From the Outerverse" saga, *Imogen* also succeeds as a standalone fable, primarily due to the main character's arc. Initially haughty, and to be frank, mostly unlikeable, she nevertheless confronts her own vulnerabilities by the end of the book and the resolution may surprise long-time Outerverse readers. For everyone else, there are some nifty trolls.



Five youngsters come down from the mountains and wreak havoc on a small town, seemingly with supernatural powers. They are the Chimera. Years later, one of the group, Regan, has fled her companions and is in hiding, but try as she might, she is forced to confront her destructive past when one of her victims, a woman named Hannah, finally catches up with her. So begins *Basilisk*, the new series by Cullen Bunn and Jonas Scharf. With several horror series under his belt, Bunn is no stranger when it comes to kicking off storylines, and though there's nothing particularly



noteworthy here, this first issue sets things up with confidence. We know the Chimera's powers are channelled through the eyes (Regan keeps her visage constantly under wraps) but the full extent of their abilities and origins remains to be seen. Both Hannah and Regan make for interesting characters, each haunted by their past and instantly forming a connection despite their inherent animosity. There's enough here to hook readers in, though whether it pays off remains to be seen.

DIE!namite Lives is the follow-up to the earlier *DIE!namite* limited series in which several diverse characters licensed by the company – such as Vampirella, Red Sonja, and John Carter – come together to smash zombies. This series tosses *Evil*

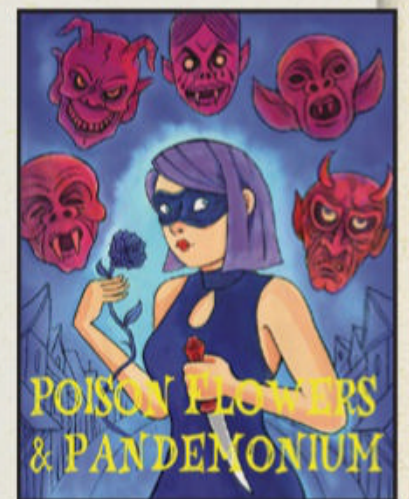
Dead's Ash into the mix and much of the first issue is devoted to him. Appropriately, since that character is known for his wit, there is a lot of humour to be found in this opening salvo, something this saga could use more of. Fred Van Lente has shown an expert mix of zombies and satire with his run on *Marvel Zombies*, but what made those comics fun was taking characters not especially known for their horror pedigree and placing them into pure horror scenarios. Most of the characters here, on the other hand, are veterans on that playing field and so it's business as usual. There are some shake-ups, especially the roles played by Vampirella and Sonja, but despite that and the character crossovers, it all seems rather routine somehow.



vibrant hues popping off every page. It's like looking at the cover of a '60s psychedelic pop album with its luscious palette of blue, orange, yellow, and green – and best of all, deep, bloody red.

It's a bittersweet experience reading the new Richard Sala omnibus *Poison Flowers & Pandemonium*. On the plus side, new Sala is always cause for celebration. Unfortunately, it also serves as a tragic reminder of the creator's death last year and the

knowledge that, barring any posthumous discoveries, this will be his final comics collection. Well known for his complex, serialized narratives such as *The Chuckling Whatsit*, the four stories collected here demonstrate he was just as comfortable with short and snappy tales. Beautifully encapsulating what made his work so special, each story is filled with plenty of wild action, punchy (and stabby) acts of mayhem, vibrant colours, and an array of quirky characters and spooky creatures. Never one to hide from his influences, Sala's affection for classic horror monsters, old mysterious dark houses, pulpy savage lands, lovely ladies, and classic sci-fi television are all on display here for everyone to partake in. A fitting testament to an artist who deserves to be recognized as one of the genre's greats. 🍷



Retired FBI agent Dennis thinks he's finally got the drop on notorious serial killer Walter, whose MO includes repeatedly playing records while slaying. After covertly befriending him for the better part of a year, Dennis thinks he's got the goods at last, but just before he can spring the trap... actually, the less you know about *Vinyl* the better, as so much of its charm lies in the weird, giddy twists and turns the story takes. I will, however, reveal some well-deserved praise for colourist Dave Stewart: *Vinyl* is simply one of the most beautifully coloured books in years, with bright,

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THE

NINTH CIRCLE

BOOKS

THE LAST HOUSE
ON NEEDLESS STREETCatriona Ward
TOR Nightfire

The Last House on Needless Street is a difficult book to review as much of its wow factor hinges on a brilliant mid-book revelation that twists the tale in a totally new and fascinating direction. Additionally, what can safely be said runs the risk of making the novel sound like a totally different type of affair than it is. But here goes: Ted Bannerman lives in a house beside the woods at the deserted end of a dead-end street.

He's the paranoid type who keeps the windows boarded up save for a few small peepholes, and has multiple locks equipped on the doors. Then there's the disfigured teenage girl and the talking, Bible-reading cat. They are in there with him too.

Meanwhile, Dee is a woman on a mission to find out what happened to her little sister on the day she disappeared from the beach – at any cost. This puts her on a crash course with Ted, who she believes might be responsible for the abduction. In order to find out if she's right, she'll need to rent the empty house next door... and watch.

All that said, absolutely nothing in *The Last House on Needless Street* is at what it first appears. Eagle-eyed readers will spot the (purposeful) cracks in the story early, but it takes nothing away from the big reveal.

The broad praise this novel has garnered thus far is well-founded, as its execution is nearly flawless. The way the pieces that don't quite fit nag at the reader only makes it more of a page-turner, which casts you ever deeper into the psyches of some incredibly damaged people.

Not everyone will make it out alive. But that's not what will keep you thinking about the story long after you've returned the novel to its shelf. I can't tell you what that thing is. You'll just have to trust me and read the book.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

NOT AFRAID TO SLAY:
WOMEN OF THE HAUNT INDUSTRYJan Knuth and Candi S. Cross
(Self-Published)

Now that we're (somewhat) returning to normal, we can begin analyzing the full extent in which COVID-19 has impacted various entertainment industries. The struggles of the film and music businesses were evident; less obvious are the ripples that extended to the haunt industry as well. Most fright fans never really contemplate the inner workings of haunts – we attend, we enjoy, but we never give much thought to the blood, sweat, and tears that go into making these joyous, spooky attractions for the general public. Fortunately, Jan Knuth's *Not Afraid to Slay* covers every corner of the haunt industry, especially the role women play in it.

It is an unfortunate fact that women often face discrimination on a daily basis, and the haunt business is no exception. Knuth highlights several women with haunts of their own, detailing their experiences with misogyny and, tragically, abuse. *Not Afraid to Slay* discusses in great detail how they must prioritize the safety of the females involved, as there have been instances of both sexual and physical assault by attending patrons. Furthermore, female directors of haunts have often been viewed as lesser-than – an argument the book effortlessly squashes.

As one might guess, the haunt industry has been a powerful propellant for activism. As an example, Hunters Against Hate, a non-profit spawned after the horrendous shooting at Pulse Nightclub, spreads awareness while simultaneously raising money towards assisting LGBTQ+ youth.

Despite the hardship faced by women in haunts, Knuth champions the good that has accompanied it, for instance, several folks involved

have cited their work with haunts as a catalyst for building confidence. And this is the crux of *Not Afraid to Slay* – it finally turns the spotlight on the largely mysterious haunt industry, and the incredible women behind it.

BREANNA WHIPPLE

EXTRA SALTY: JENNIFER'S BODY

Frederick Blichert
ECW Press

Balancing critical reception, filmmaker interviews, and a hefty splash of easily digestible academic film theory, Frederick's Blichert's long-form examination of *Jennifer's Body* is a solid interrogation of the cult film and its rocky history.

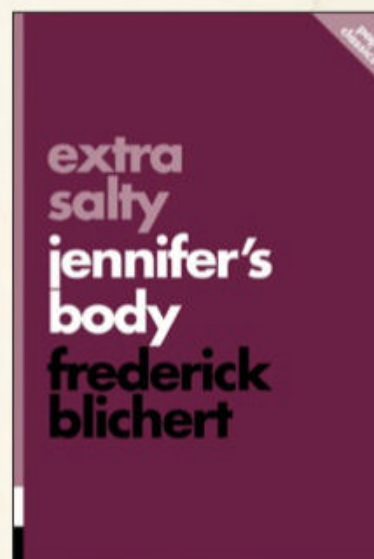
Famously, or infamously, *Jennifer's Body* was released with a misleading marketing campaign into a social climate that was perhaps "not ready" for the nuanced, feminist, bloody demonic teen film. Blichert's book breaks down both the film's contemporary reception as well as its

current reappraisal in the #MeToo era. It's a singular, cohesive piece that looks at the film's many angles through chapters based around the general topics of queerness, filmmaker intention and success, and the teenage experience.

Though the author asserts several times in *Extra Salty* that Amanda Seyfried's Needy is the main protagonist of the film, not Megan Fox's titular Jennifer, Blichert dedicates a good number

of pages to defending Fox's performance and contextualizing the release of the film. Thanks to her many candid interviews and a public spat with director Michael Bay, Fox is far from a blank canvas in our world, and this book also serves as a study of the interplay between her on-screen and off-screen persona.

Extra Salty is not only a deep dive into a beloved film, it's an *amuse-bouche* into the world of academic film studies. Casually dropping theoretical heavy hitters such as Robin Wood, Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, and Barbara Creed adds heft to the critical and further reaching discussion of *Jennifer's Body*. No film is released or examined in a vacuum, and Blichert observes that with aplomb. The book never sacrifices readability for education, however, and coolly makes classic film theory accessible and applicable. The author doesn't claim to be objective or apolitical and instead serves up a well-researched love letter to a misunderstood film. Fans of *Jennifer's Body* will





dig the insight into the production and release, and they will likely learn a great deal about film analysis and shifting audience reception too.

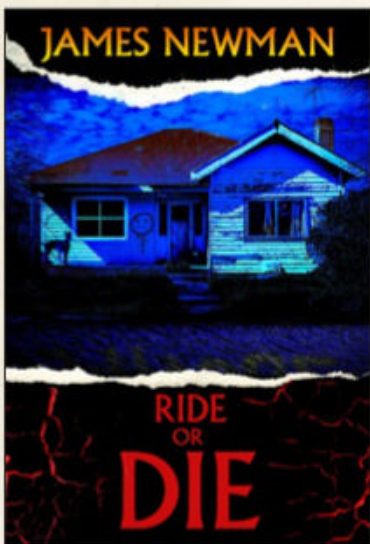
DEIRDRE CRIMMINS

RIDE OR DIE

James Newman

Silver Shamrock Publishing

Forget buckling up; that won't save you here. Just grab whatever's closest for as long as you can because with James Newman's latest, your senses will be pushed to the brink with an intensity that belies the book's mere one hundred pages.



"I heard Mike Mitchell's penis looks like an acorn," is the opening line, introducing us to Amelia, Cassie, and Folline, three besties who'd do anything for each other. Planted firmly on the wall as the proverbial fly, we're made privy to the aftermath of Amelia discovering her crappy boyfriend has been cheating on her. From our unsuspecting vantage point, we get a sense of who each girl is and what she's all about. It's all so authentic, it seems possible the author was a teenage girl in a former life who's channelled past experiences into believable banter and generational whimsy, which somehow doubles the effects of the devastation yet to unfold.

When Amelia overhears her dad making suspicious chit-chat on his cell with a woman clearly not her mom, she conspires to visit his homewrecking mistress to teach the bitch a lesson she won't soon forget. In carrying out this plan, the girls discover things nobody was meant to find within the other woman's house. The night of retribution quickly redlines into a living nightmare far more terrifying than anything their favourite scary movies could portray. Their thirst for justice morphs into a basic need for survival as they come face to face with the worst kind of monsters imaginable among humans. Newman fires from all cylinders as innocence and mayhem collide like twin freight trains barreling down on each other, neither willing to pull the brakes. A guaranteed blast for all who dare cruise along its path. "Oh, shit" handles are optional, but highly recommended.

RICK HIPSON

SONG OF THE SANDMAN

J-F. Dubeau

Inkshares

Has anyone else noticed how trendy cults have suddenly become in horror? J-F. Dubeau follows up his deliciously gruesome 2017 sophomore novel *A God in the Shed* with the sequel *Song of the Sandman*, a mystical journey through the sewers of Montreal to the quaint, unassuming compounds of Laval.

A doomsday cult that reeks of Jim Jones and Charles Manson, The Sandmen worship their

DANTE'S PICK



BENEATH A PALE SKY

Philip Fracassi

Lethe Press

Reading a Philip Fracassi story is a vivid, cinematic experience, comparable to watching a well-made movie. Reading his second collection is like bingeing several movies, each of which etches itself on your brain.

Some of the movies you'll find in these pages are pretty spectacular: in "Harvest," a tornado shatters a wedding ceremony like a punishment from heaven for poorly made choices: in this context, one man's ability to slightly affect reality isn't enough to prevent wrath from above – and from evil men beneath the tumultuous sky. In "The Wheel," a freak plane accident wreaks havoc on the large Merry-Go-Round next to the ocean: quite a powerful image of the Wheel of *Misfortune* (depicted on the book's cover) that Fracassi, like few others, can milk for all its cliffhanging suspense and terror. Meanwhile, "Soda Jerk" sees a 16-year-old newcomer

to a town called Sabbath taken by a neighbour boy on some strange sight-seeing. "Symphony," about a girl sexually abused by her father, is the only one here which felt off, unconvincing. "Ateuchus" may be distantly reminiscent of some classics, such as G.R.R. Martin's "Sandkings," but its depiction of a

slow-burn, gradual invasion by ever-bigger alien bugs in a solitary scientist's lab is gripping and gleefully gruesome. "ID" and "Fragile Dreams" offer reason and reality-shattering experiences (the latter contains another explosive scene of large-scale destruction) – and only the final short story, "Death, My Old Friend," seems to be on a lighter note... until it isn't!

With this collection (which also features an excellent introduction by Josh Malerman), Philip Fracassi has justified the expectations that his debut aroused, and one can hardly wait for his upcoming novel, *A Child Alone with Strangers*.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ



SATURDAY
27 JUNE, 1985

RICHARD CHIZMAR'S **CHASING THE BOOGEYMAN** FINDS ITS TERROR IN THE
UNSETTLING PLACES WHERE REALITY AND FICTION COLLIDE

ISSUE NUMBER
202

Memories of **Murder**

RICK HIPSON

IT'S SCARY ENOUGH KNOWING A MONSTER HAS INVADDED THE TRANQUILITY OF YOUR SMALL TOWN. It's worse knowing the monster may be one of your own; maybe even someone you grew up or shared a meal with. In the metafictional world of Richard Chizmar's novel *Chasing the Boogeyman* (out now from Gallery Books), the possibility of unblinking eyes watching and waiting to strike and kill lurks around every corner.

When Chizmar started writing the book, not even he could have guessed how the story would unfold. A key revelation ultimately forced him to adjust course.

"[It was] originally a straightforward novel with a first-person narrator," Chizmar tells *Rue Morgue*. "[Then] I realized, because I was setting it in my hometown and because this character was going to be fashioned after myself during this time period of my life, it was going to be a whole lot more fun to write it as myself."

His storytelling decision only heightens the novel's sense of being in the moment with the folks of Edgewood, and also became an opportunity to re-imagine and relive entire chapters from his childhood.

"It was an interesting dynamic," says Chizmar of writing the book, which was inspired by a real-life home invader locally dubbed as the Phantom Fondler. "I realized very early on that I wanted to go over these events and these murders and what was happening to my own small town in a way where I could kind of *Blair Witch* this. Because so much of it did happen, I felt like I could weave in the murders that didn't happen in a really believable way. I started with the history of the town and the people and my childhood and growing up there. I was writing about myself during a time period in my life where things were so brand new and towering in front of me with two big words: What's next? It was such an interesting dynamic because what's next for me was happening very much in a place in the past, which was my old house I grew up in, looking out my old bedroom

window and seeing the ghost of my childhood."

As a result, Chizmar's latest does much more than depict the riveting nightmare gripping the town; it plants the events firmly in our mind's eye in high definition while infusing plenty of heart into the proceedings. Readers are destined to cheer on each tiny breakthrough, however short lived, and feel the devastating heartache of a community plagued by a murderous madman who is attacking young women without fear of capture. Rumours soon run rampant, leaving Edgewood both divided and shaken to its core by a real-life boogeyman who may as well be a ghost.

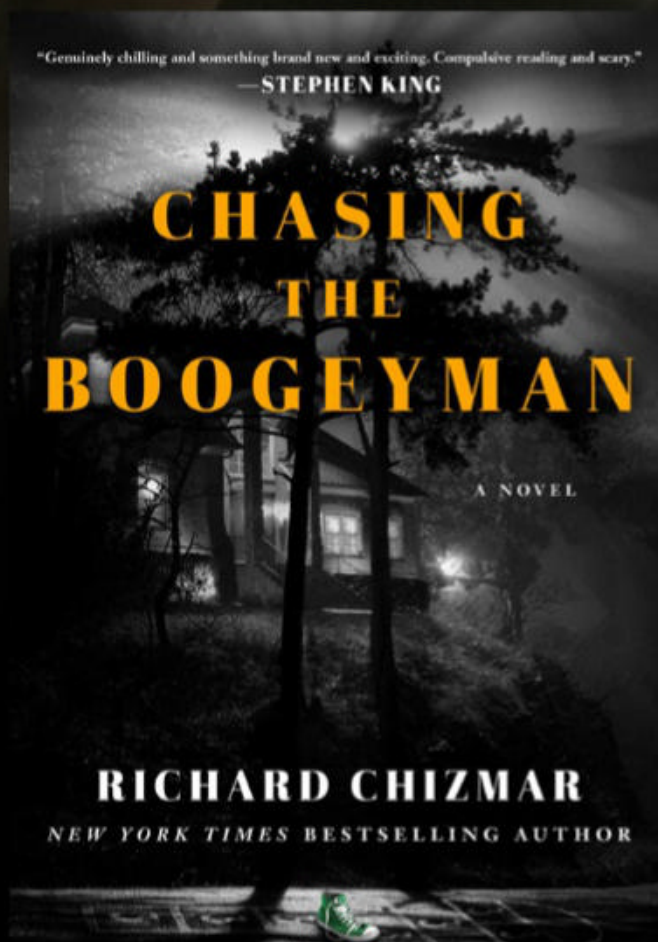
A final element that sets *Chasing the Boogeyman* apart from similar stories is that each chapter concludes with a series of photographs, featuring local actors hired by the author. In this, Chizmar took cues from his long love affair with true crime books.

"When I read a true crime book, I always flip to the photos section, which puts the gravity of the events there in black and white," he confesses. "I immediately thought I want to have photos at the end of every chapter, so it drives home what the readers have just digested."

These elements were so effective at making believers out of his audience that Chizmar had to emblazon the words "A Novel" on the front cover, and he still received screenshots from early readers saying they had to Google various references just to be certain.

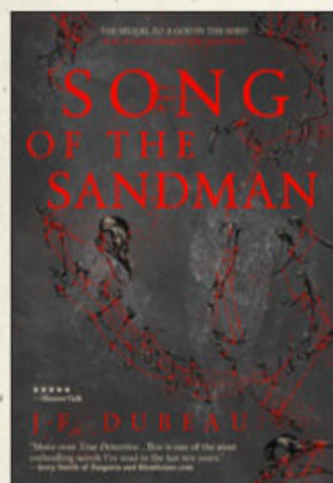
Not only does the author come closer to the killer than he could have dared to imagine with *Chasing the Boogeyman*, it's rumoured that he's "99.9%" sure he'll continue where

he and the killer left off with a sequel. That's great news, considering his metafictional masterpiece demands to be revisited and explored long after the end pages are turned and the cover closed. Do yourself a favour this Halloween and join the wide-eyed rookie as he revisits the darkest path of his hometown and proves why the monsters you can't see or hear are often the deadliest of them all. 🧛‍



captured God of Hate and Death, fittingly bound inside the rotting corpse of a serial killer from a few towns over. Meanwhile, the aftermath of the Cicero massacre has caused a mass exodus from the small village of Saint Ferdinand, leaving behind survivors who know the truth behind the evil that has plagued the town for a century.

Utilizing the same bouncing perspective as the first book, we meet a couple more key players in the Sandmen racket, though fans of the fearsome God of Hate and Death might be disappointed at his more secondary performance here. Instead, *Sandman* focuses on the plight of modern-day wizards battling it out with enemies of an ideological persuasion; the rivaling cults prove that touting the crusade of the divine is neither honourable or righteous, and their respective body counts are competitive.



Maintaining a shred of his prior Lovecraftian influences, Dubeau manages to tie up the loose ends and assorted cliffhangers from *God*, while seamlessly weaving enough edge-of-your-seat mysteries to warrant a third installment. There are many moving parts to *Sandman*, and Dubeau balances them well, combining *True Detective*-style mystery with Brian Keene level of gore. If you aren't tired of malevolent cults in your horror pie, I recommend a strong Caribou and a long weekend – you'll tear through *Song of the Sandman* like a god plucking out a screaming Quebecois man's larynx.

PASHA NIELSEN

RAVENOUS

Ray Garton

Gauntlet Press

When Emily Crane's car breaks down near the woods in the small town of Big Rock, the last thing she expects is to be attacked by some foul-smelling lunatic whose face keeps changing as he brutally assaults her. When the violence spreads across town, it becomes abundantly clear that its protectors will need everything they can muster to defend against an onslaught of terror that isn't supposed to exist.

Originally published by Leisure in 2008, *Ravenous* doesn't just take a bite out of the werewolf mythos, it rips the entire heart out of everything you thought you knew about the beasties. What's left is a fresh brand of savagery that leaves an indelible mark.

Forget full moons and wolf bites by the moors: in Ray Garton's world, it's the sex that'll get ya. When the eviscerated bodies of citizens and law enforcement alike pile up, it's on Sheriff Hurley to stop the infestation of hungry beasts who live merely to devour, rut, and multiply. The Sheriff's only offer of help comes from a disfigured stranger who claims a personal stake in hunting down and killing the alpha werewolf responsible for tearing his life apart years earlier.

With Garton's adeptness at creating relatable characters, it's easy to be drawn into the players of this story with all their flaws and attractions. Despite the merciless nature of his lycanthropes, Garton allows the humanity of his world to bleed through even the most soul-crushing of tragedies and there are plenty of those to go around.

All the tension boils to a frenzied finale that's abrupt, brutal, and guaranteed to keep you howling for more. Thankfully, *Ravenous'* sequel, *Bestial*, is scheduled for publication next year as a limited edition, in case you get bitten.



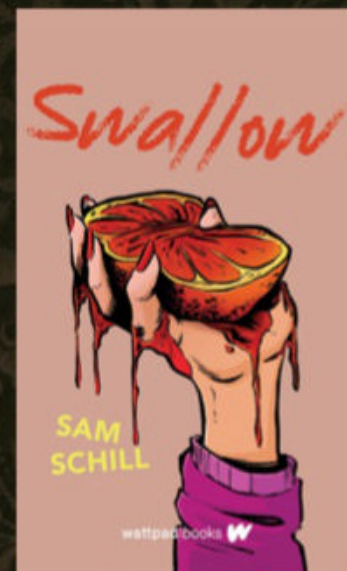
RICK HIPSON

LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

SCREAMING INTO PRINT

Not long ago, massive online fiction-sharing website Wattpad (where – full disclosure – you can read my own teen horror serial) made its first foray into proper paperbacks via its Wattpad Books imprint. Recently, two of its young adult genre titles hit my desk. Let's look inside...

Swallow is a careful-what-you-wish-for/revenge tale mashup that's elevated by its inventively gruesome consumption conceit. Mildred is that kid in high school everyone picks on. Her parents don't understand and aren't even around enough to try. Left to her own devices, she's gotten desperate enough to venture out to a mysterious magic shop that randomly popped up in her browser in search of a curse – and ends up getting a whole lot more. Soon she's killing and eating the jocks and the mean girls, absorbing all their best attributes (for instance, consuming an arm for strength or a brain for smarts). Mildred knows what she's doing – or rather, what is happening to her – is very wrong, but that doesn't mean she's able to stop it. Author Sam Schill does a solid job of combining several well-worn tropes into something gory and compelling. Teen books like this didn't exist when I was young, but I think I would have dug it.



Teen me would have also liked Grace Collins' *Creatures of the Night*, a werewolf story that asks: what if there were worse monsters than shifters? More dark fantasy than horror, we join Milena in the days before her twentieth birthday, when she'll finally become one of her village's hunters and no longer be shunned. But if that's true, why does everything feel so off? Needless to say, it's not the birthday she expects. Instead, it reveals a world far larger and more complicated than she ever imagined, where the good guys are bad and the bad guys might actually be... okay. The story clips along, doling out its monstrous reveals in careful measure, until arriving at a bittersweet conclusion that leaves the door open for a sequel. If there's a gripe to be had here, it's that Milena gets tugged around a lot in the storyline, so she tends to be reacting rather than acting – and often makes poor decisions when she does take initiative – which, even excusing her naivety, gets frustrating at points. Younger me would have had a few choice words for her and she might have even muttered them aloud while reading on the school bus.

Finally, bonus points are due for *Swallow's* striking illustrated cover. I'm not entirely sure it properly sells the cannibal story within, but it definitely makes you want to pick it up. So, job done.



MONICA S. KUEBLER

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THE FRIGHT GALLERY

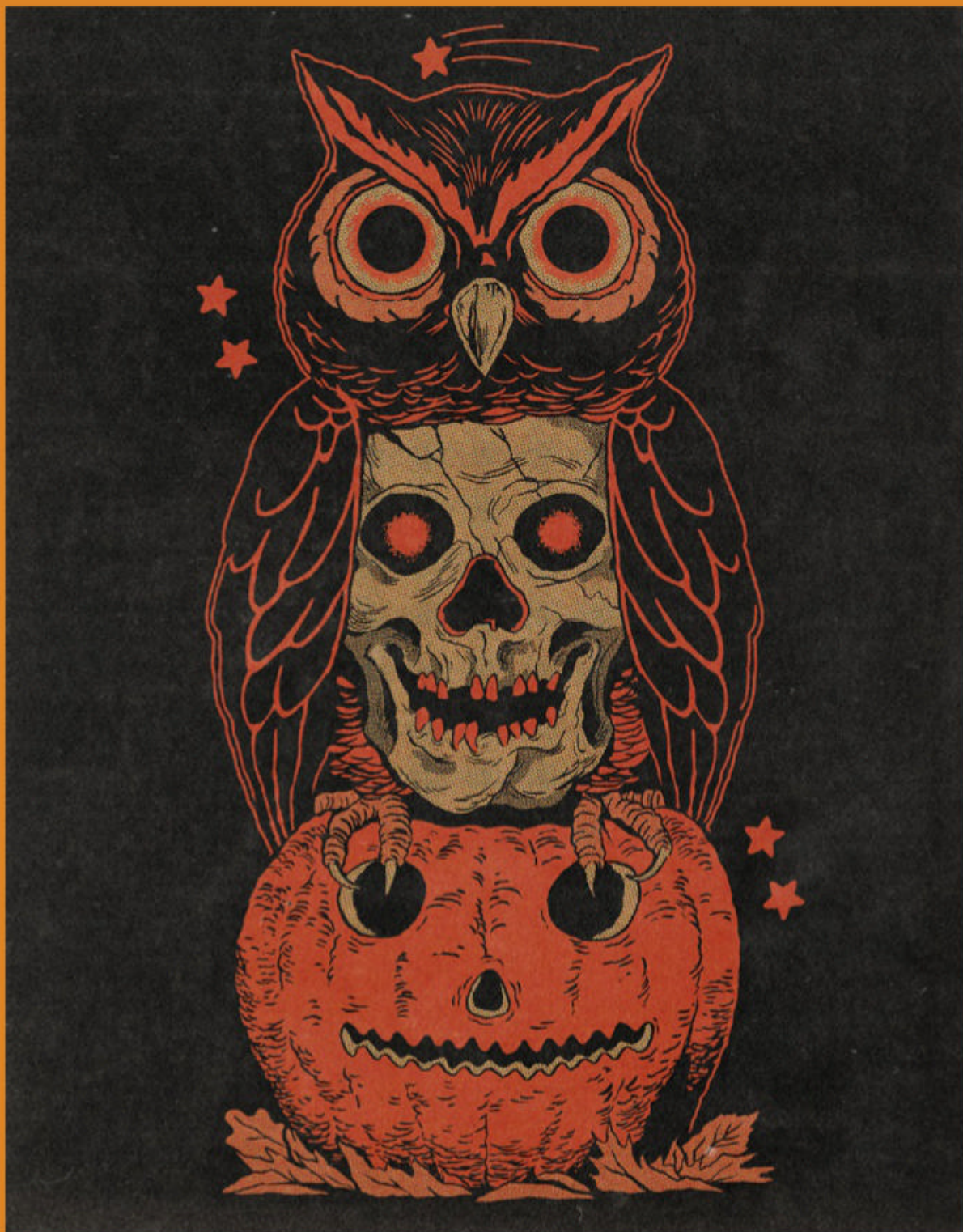
CURATED BY PAIGE REYNOLDS

202



THIS MONTH:
THE VINTAGE VISIONS OF AUSTIN PARDUN

A **RODMORQUE** COLLECTIBLE



Every day is Halloween in the world of Austin Pardun. Around every corner lurks a leering skeleton; in every tree, a watchful owl, and every meal is candy corn. His artwork is a perfect combination of cozy Halloween vintage and modern horror culture. Using crisp inks, a limited colour palette and distressed textures, Pardun creates fun, spooky art that would suit any trick-or-treater's wall.

HOMETOWN

Jackson, Michigan

WEAPON OF CHOICE

"First, an ugly, unrecognizable sketch that only I can decipher. Then micron brush pens and paper, scanned into the computer for colouring and textures."

DEEDS

"Every year, me and my buddy Ryan Ward (Instagram: @littleshopofgore) make custom Vacuform masks; it's becoming a Halloween tradition. I also got to do Halloween cut-out masks for Adult Swim of some of my favourite characters."

MY NIGHTMARE FUEL

"Vintage Beistle decorations, practical effects in splatter movies, Japanese monster movies, the *Goosebumps* corner from my elementary book fairs, and trick-or-treating on a cold Midwest night and terrorizing my neighbours."

LAST WORDS

"The wind outside nested in each tree, prowled the sidewalks in invisible treads like unseen cats. Tom Skelton shivered. Anyone could see that the wind was a special wind this night, and the darkness took on a special feel because it was All Hallows' Eve. Everything seemed cut from soft black velvet or gold or orange velvet. Smoke panted up out of a thousand chimneys like the plumes of funeral parades. From kitchen windows drifted two pumpkin smells: gourds being cut, pies being baked." From Ray Bradbury's *The Halloween Tree*.

RESTING PLACE

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A DUMPSTER DIVE INTO HORROR'S ODDS & CURIOS

DEVILS IN THE DETAILS

BY
STACIE
PONDER

A S ANYONE WHO HAS SEEN MORE THAN ONE SLASHER MOVIE IS AWARE,

slasher movies are largely populated by character archetypes: the final girl, the annoying jokester, the ineffectual authority figure, and so on. My favourite, however, is horror's answer to Cassandra of Troy: the doomsday prophet.

The doomsayer is usually a local who attempts to warn the van full of horny teens away from whatever remote location they're headed to, for said remote location is full of murderous danger. Sometimes the doomsayer is calm and perfectly rational, as is Ranger McLean in Jeff Lieberman's underrated, sleazy backwoods romp [Just Before Dawn](#). Others are a bit more flavourful and unhinged in their efforts, à la the unkempt, eyeball-brandishing Abel of [Friday the 13th Part III](#). Of course, we all know that presentation counts for nothing, for the slasher movie horny teens will never listen, opting instead to do what slasher movie horny teens always do: go to a remote location, be horny, and get dead.

[Friday the 13th](#)'s Crazy Ralph is undoubtedly the most famous example of this archetype. Just reading his name is enough to conjure images of his worn, floppy hat and the dulcet tones of his "You're doomed!" warnings. When he spots the kids in town, he tries to tell them about the death curse on "Camp Blood," and when that's not enough, he's content to hop on his bike and make a 40-mile round trip to remind them that they're doomed if they stay. The counsellors don't believe him, and look what that got them: stabbed, chopped, and sliced like so many salad ingredients. His fellow townsfolk, on the other hand, do believe him, but disregard him nonetheless. They're the ones who call him "crazy," after all — and unkind as that may be, anyone purporting to be a "messenger of God" has earned himself some solid side-eye.

On a recent rewatch of that seminal slasher flick, I was shocked at how much detail writer Victor Miller put into the character of Ralph, who could have simply spouted a line of homegrown gos-

pel and pedalled away into the night. We're told that he frequently gets so drunk that folks call the cops and he ends up spending a week in jail. And then Sergeant Tierney drops the detail that I will now brandish like one of Abel's patented eyeballs: ol' Crazy Ralph has a worried, doting wife, one who was a "nervous wreck" until Tierney picked him up at Camp Crystal Lake and brought him home.

Sure, this could send someone (not me, though — *definitely* not me) into some kind of fan-fiction fantasy about Young Ralph and Unnamed Wife. Whence in their marriage did he start thinking that he's a messenger of God? How many nights has she sat alone at the table, dinner going cold, while he's off warning horny teens and/or sleeping off a bender in the clink? Let's face it, Unnamed Wife endured a lot and must have truly loved our bike-riding prophet — so imagine, if you will, that moment when the cops come knocking at her door during the events of [Friday the 13th Part 2](#).

"Oh, what's he done now?" she asks wearily, only to be told that someone killed him out near Packanack Lodge. Maybe a small part of her was relieved.

More than Mrs. Crazy Ralph in particular, though, this got me thinking about all of the slasher movie relatives out there. Sometimes, like Pamela Voorhees, they avenge their dead loved ones. Sometimes we merely get a glimpse at their grief, as we do when Sheriff Brackett sees his daughter Annie's dead body on the gurney in [Halloween II](#). Mostly, though, they not only go unnamed, they go unseen and unacknowledged... but that doesn't mean they're not waiting at home, only to get that fateful knock on the door. So next time you delight in watching a character get their head punched off by an undead psychopath on a Manhattan rooftop (because goodness gracious, it really is delightful), spare a thought, won't you, for the ones who will grieve them. All the archetypes — be they jokesters, horny teens, ineffectual authority figures, or even troublesome bike-riding drunkards — are loved by someone, not solely us fans. 🍷



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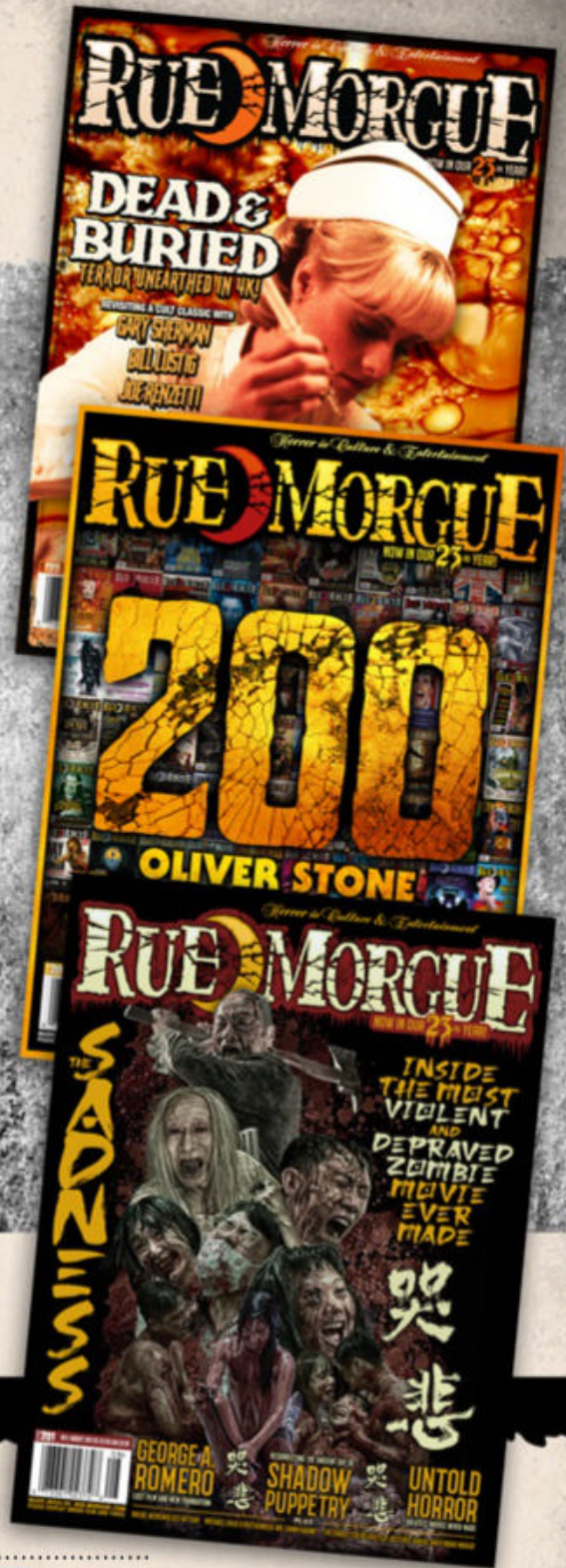
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REVIEWS BY ALEX DELLER, AARON VON LUPTON, GEORGE PACHECO,
SEAN PLUMMER, GRANT SKELTON, AND JEFF SZPIRGLAS



THE CALL OF CTHULHU SPOKEN WORD

H.P. Lovecraft/Andrew Leman/
Anima Morte

CADABRA RECORDS

Spoken word horror titan Cadabra brings back Lovecraft's landmark tale of cosmic horror "The Call of Cthulhu" for another go 'round, this time in a "Definitive Edition" with a new and improved reading by Andrew Leman (who also did the first edition) and a new score by Swedish prog rock film-influenced composers Anime Morte, replacing the old version by Theologian. The results? Leman's reading is vastly improved with better tempo and the production and pressing sound superb, though Anime Morte's score is a little too subdued to add much character to such a freaked-out tale (though the voodoo vibes that tie in with the New Orleans swamp themes are a nice touch). If you bought the first edition, we're not so sure this definitive edition will be worth another purchase but, given the stature of the story, you can bet there will be more renditions of Cthulhu to come. ☠☠☠½ **AVL**



MIDNIGHT SYNDICATE INSTRUMENTAL

Bloodlines

LINFALDIA RECORDS

On *Bloodlines*, faux soundtrack act Midnight Syndicate has created a mini-album acting as a musical prequel to its popular *13th Hour* release. Here, the imagined film character Madeline Haverghast receives a musical story behind what occurred before *The 13th Hour*'s narrative. There

are humorous winks to old standards, such as a distorted take on "Here Comes the Bride," while the title track includes a melodic riff on "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," taking it to a much darker place with orchestration that includes solo piano, pipe organ, and chimes – a range of instruments that provides a depth of sound that truly feels cinematic. Because MS has such a detailed story in mind (the final track, "Sands of Time," is meant to segue directly into "13th Hour"), the album has a real narrative drive, rather than just disconnected cuts of mood music. And you've got to give the band props for embracing such a sense of Gothic grandeur throughout.

☠☠☠☠ **JS**



HAIKU SALUT

The Hill, The Light, The Ghost

SECRET NAME

Derbyshire-based electronica/post-rock trio Haiku Salut has covered an impressive amount of terrain in its decade of making music, accompanying a steady stream of releases with ideas and experiential endeavours that extend into film and virtual reality. While the fourth album explores the concept of ghosts, it treats them as echoes of the past rather than things that go bump in the night – more W.G. Sebald than M.R. James, if you will. An understated eeriness will occasionally brush fingers across your nape (stemming, perhaps, from tales of gathering field recordings in abandoned places), but the overriding mood here is one of slight, quiet sadness, deftly conjured via ambient swatches, percussive rattles, acoustic guitars, and synths that unfurl like small crystal flowers. Exploring memory and the aching place where loss dwells, *The Hill, The Light, The Ghost* is a haunting and moving piece of work – perfect for late-night ruminations and fans of Labradford, Rachel's, and Mogwai. ☠☠☠☠ **AD**



THE WAY OF DARKNESS: A TRIBUTE TO JOHN CARPENTER

Various

RUSTBLADE

John Carpenter is kind of up there with the Misfits these days as far as horror-themed music goes. You can release, reissue, and repackage anything with the famed director/composer's name on it and you can bet fans will be interested. In the case of *The Way of Darkness*, various, mostly unknown electronic artists put together interpretations of Carpenter's best-known themes: "Matthew Ghost Story" (from *The Fog*), *Assault on Precinct 13*'s main theme, and *Christine*'s main riff, a track practically made for amped-up electronic beats. Only Claudio Simonetti's name stands out; he reinvents the *Halloween* and *Escape From New York* main themes as drugged-up techno numbers. The overall flavour of *The Way of Darkness* is all-night rave-a-thons, but

Carpenter's themes remain so iconic, nearly any excuse to re-experience them is a good one, and this compilation just adds further evidence of the genre legend's ever-expanding influence on the musical landscape.

☠☠☠ **AVL**



MOMY FORTUNA

Hexennacht

(INDEPENDENT)

Taking its name from the memorable witch from *The Last Unicorn*, Vancouver-based Momy Fortuna's debut album is a steamy brew of eight cues that are alternately sultry and spooky. Eschewing guitar for a instrumental palette that includes violin, bass, and percussion, the all-female quartet's emphasis is on the dynamic, often wailing vocals that take centre stage. Of the eight tracks that comprise their debut, horror-heads will likely gravitate to Momy Fortuna's variation on Goblin's theme from *Suspiria* which, given the band's emphasis on cavernous sounds and experimen-

CHILDREN OF THE CORN

Jonathan Elias

1984 PUBLISHING

Children of the Corn benefitted from some creepy kid performances as well as Jonathan Elias' score, both of which raised the sum effect of the Stephen King adaptation beyond its exploitative trappings. Here, composer Jonathan Elias makes effective use of a children's chorus, heard in the opening theme, which lends the proceedings an ambiance of dread from the get-go. He plays with several ideas that utilize a wide palette of sounds, ranging from synths and dissonant piano stabs, and rounds them out with a full string section. Although it clocks in at a mere 30 minutes, the album's brevity works to its advantage; there are enough textures and musical ideas that gel to form a coherent listening experience. 1984's repackaging of the old Varese Sarabande LP is bursting with colour: the luminous vinyl variants and artist Gary Pullin's use of vibrant yellows, reds, and oranges provide a striking update of the original artwork, a feast for the eyes as well as the ears. ☠☠☠☠½ **JS**



PODCASTS FROM BEYOND

Nightlight

THEME: Narrated Short Stories

FREQUENCY: Biweekly

Tonia Ransom is an author and librarian on a two-pronged mission: to revive the lost art of radio drama and to create space for Black writers and performers. Founded in 2018 through a successful fundraising campaign, the *Nightlight* podcast has been creeping along through four seasons of chilling tales thus far. Each biweekly installment is written by a Black author, and performed by a Black narrator. Depending on the season, episode lengths can be erratic, ranging anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour (sometimes containing very short pieces of “flash fiction”), but Ransom is reliable for her selection of interesting and off-kilter horror stories rather than those containing more conventional genre tropes. Lately, episodes also include a follow-up interview with the author. *Nightlight*’s open submission policy for authors and narrators – choosing each on an individual basis, regardless of experience – means some narrators are better than others, and the stories don’t always land, but it also means undiscovered talent is given a rare space to shine. For every tale written by notables such as Tananarive Due, you’ll hear something from a newcomer like Victoria Hutchinson, whose story “Bloodlust” features a cryptid, a serial killer, and a strange girl. The podcast is currently Patreon-funded, with notable backers including filmmaker Mike Flanagan. It’s a night-light you’ll want to leave on to keep you company after dark. ☠☠☠

DENMAN C. ANDERSON

NIGHTLIGHT

AUDIO HORROR FOR ALL.

Afro Horror

THEME: Discussion

FREQUENCY: Monthly

Often times, the best path toward filling a gap for an underserved community comes from within that community itself. Such is the case with Sade Sellers and her podcast *Afro Horror*. Inspired by both the *Horror Noire* documentary and one of its creators, trailblazing horror journalist Ashlee Blackwell, Sellers has been addressing the Black experience in horror films since 2019. Currently a monthly podcast with episodes ranging from one to two hours, each tackles a single movie, with at least one notable Black character or creative behind the camera. The show is lively and upbeat, thanks in part to a charismatic host, and a variety of interesting guests such as Edwin Hodge, star of *The Purge* series, and Jessica Guess of the popular Black Girls Guide to Horror site. Neither overly academic nor total fluff, *Afro Horror* manages to be a lot of fun while discussing serious topics, such as representation and the treatment of Black characters. Though the audio quality can be uneven at times, each season brings more and more ambition and interactivity to the mix, with an active Clubhouse group, an online shop stocked with merch, podcast collaborations, a full website, and lively social media accounts. A breath of fresh air for Black horror fans, *Afro Horror* also offers worthwhile insight to those outside the community. ☠☠☠½

DENMAN C. ANDERSON

AFRO

HORROR

tal vocals, fits seamlessly with the rest of the album. Other standouts include the bluesy title track and album opener “Be Rather.” Ultimately, *Hexennacht* has a dreamy kind of cacophony that veers from jarring to lulling, sometimes within the same track. ☠☠☠ JS



IN VEIL

Lunatic

(INDEPENDENT)

Imagine if Nicki Minaj and Rob Zombie had a baby... Aside from the fact that Sheri Moon would freak, that particular music review cliché does encapsulate the genre-hopping practiced by Toronto duo In Veil. Vocalist Haysi Veil and instrumentalist Ady Cernea sew together Zombie’s spookshow theatrics (theremin-style synths, chugging guitars) with Minaj’s diamond-encrusted swagger on their debut EP *Lunatic*. Cannily, they have recruited The Birthday Massacre’s Michael Falcore to produce and, like TBM, *Lunatic* deftly weaves pretty female vocals with gothic/industrial backing tracks. That said, Veil and Cernea’s sound is far more indebted to the likes of Minaj than The Sisters of Mercy, with tracks such as “Spider” and “Lunatic” combining hip hop braggadocio and beats with macabre imagery. Not scary good, but far from frightening bad. ☠☠½ SP

GOTH

its entombment with an eerie and evil album that boasts delightfully demented art from Wes Benscoter, who has also worked with Slayer, Cattle Decapitation, and Mortician. On *The Tritonus Bell*, Hooded Menace has truly honed its songwriting; a worthy addition to its already excellent infectious riffs. But this album spreads that infection across a collection of remarkable songs; the opening notes of “Chime Diabolicus” reach out like the Reaper’s hand, and fans will splinter their spines headbanging to the bouncy bass lines of “Corpus Asunder.” Hooded Menace offers us a front row seat to our own damnation. Take it! ☠☠☠☠ GS



CARCASS

Torn Arteries

NUCLEAR BLAST

Carcass’ first two albums, *Reek of Putrefaction* and *Symphonies of Sickness*, served as grindcore landmarks while *Necroticism – Descanting the Insalubrious* and *Heartwork* pioneered melodic death metal back in the early ’90s. Now, *Torn Arteries* celebrates that entire Carcass oeuvre, just as the band’s 2013 reunion album *Surgical Steel* did before it, but this offering possesses even more originality. The yoke of post-reunion nerves has been cast off, and *Torn Arteries* gleefully indulges in every major Carcass trope, from brutal grinding riffs and blasts, to rocked outsections that wouldn’t sound out of place on the band’s controversial 1996 effort *Swansong*, particularly on “In God We Trust.” Yet *Torn Arteries* remains extreme metal through and through, a thrashing exercise with cheeky lyrics on songs like “Eleanor Rigor Mortis,” “Kelly’s Meat Emporium,” and “The Devil Rides Out.” If *Surgical Steel* was the appetizer for Carcass’ return to the stage, then consider *Torn Arteries* to be the bloody main course. ☠☠☠☠

GP

METAL

HOODED MENACE

The Tritonus Bell

SEASON OF MIST

Since 2008’s *Fulfill the Curse*, Finland’s Hooded Menace has inspired a legacy of lunacy. The band has made no qualms about its reverence for vintage horror films – in fact, Amando de Ossorio’s 1972 classic *Tombs of the Blind Dead* gave the group its moniker. *The Tritonus Bell* finds Hooded Menace emerging from

METAL





GHOSTS INSIDE THE SPIRITBOX

IN A WORLD SATURATED WITH LIMITLESS OPTIONS SORTED BY KEYWORD AND DOLED OUT BY ALGORITHMS THAT CREATE UMBRELLA TERMS LIKE “death metal” and “horror punk,” it’s always welcome to come across a band whose appreciation for darkness lurks beneath the surface. Case in point: Vancouver, Canada, metalcore group Spiritbox. Sure, the band could fit comfortably on a bill with Tesseract and Architects, but underneath the crunch of mega-riffs and melodic vocals lurks the spectre of the paranormal, a fact illustrated by the group’s namesake, which refers to a device that allows one to communicate with the dead by scanning radio frequencies, creating a din of white noise through which ghosts presumably speak.

“We have always been drawn to the noises that an actual spirit box creates,” reveals vocalist Courtney LaPlante, who started the band with husband and guitarist Mike Stringer. “The voices that can be heard, as well as the uneasy static that comes out sometimes, both are equally terrifying and intriguing; it’s a sonic inspiration for us. But I will always be inspired lyrically by the paranormal, as it will always represent the unknown. Sometimes that’s comforting, sometimes it’s anxiety inducing.”

The band explored its paranormal obsession right from its 2017 self-titled EP, which incorporated electronic voice phenomenon (EVP) recordings in each song. Actual spirit box sessions also accompany their live events, inviting fans on an auditory journey between the worlds of the living and the dead.

“It’s just always going to be the mysterious unanswered question we all ask: what happens when we die?” says LaPlante of the band’s unique juxtaposition of darkness and light, heavy metal riffs and ethereal melodies.

“The thought of being trapped in limbo as a spirit is horrible, and we all wonder if we will end up with the same fate. How much influence do they have over our world?”

Out September 17 via Rise Records, Spiritbox’s *Eternal Blue* follows the same theme of horrors barely-there, woven between words, songs, and sounds. And you can expect that spiritual obsession to flow over into visuals as well; in the video for “Holy Roller,” lush bouquets, bright sunshine, and pagan stick art evoke the folk horror hit *Midsummer*.

“The music video is influenced by the visuals of that movie,” says LaPlante. “Most people would reference the flower crown and the pyre, but the biggest inspiration was the bright cheerful cinematography of the movie, which made the darkness even more disturbing! I love Ari Aster’s movies, because although they explore the unknown and surreal, supernatural things we all fear, they push past that into universal, tangible things that are part of the human experience. I find stuff like that to be the most terrifying. That’s what drives my anxiety, which in turn influences my music.”

So if you want to experience how horror and the supernatural are creatively incorporated into a modern metal sound, grab a copy of Spiritbox’s

Eternal Blue this fall. And for those still left wondering whether the band really does believe in the paranormal and actively tries to communicate with the other side, LaPlante is quick to draw the line.

“In all honesty, though I am a skeptic, I am too scared to invite that stuff into my home. I like to err on the side of caution and respect to the dead, whatever the truth might be.” 🐼



PLAY DEAD



NOW PLAYING > FIVE YEARS OF *DEAD BY DAYLIGHT* BY EVAN MILLAR

I'll admit with some shame that I was late to the *Dead by Daylight* party. The popular asymmetric multiplayer game from Montreal's Behaviour Interactive always looked appealing to my horror sensibilities, but I assumed I had missed the boat on its gory goodness by waiting a few years after its 2016 release to play it. I thought about how many times I'd been burned by online games in the past, spending money on cosmetic upgrades or weapons only to see them abandoned by their player base as soon as an inevitable sequel came along. Well, it's been about three years since I had that conversation with myself, and there's never been a better time to climb aboard: *DbD* has kept its rabid fanbase alive and kicking with DLCs and collabs with properties such as *Resident Evil* and *Stranger Things*. Now available on six platforms and celebrating its fifth anniversary, its developers assure me there are no plans for a follow-up – just more content.

"As we went along, we were able to make our own lore and our own story stronger," explains Dave Richard, Behaviour Interactive's Creative Director, "so that we can bring in weirder stuff and go a little outside of pure classic horror and still make sense and have a cohesive world."

The premise of *DbD* is simple: trapped in an unfamiliar environment with three other strangers and surrounded by an ominous black fog, the only chance of survival lies in restoring generators scattered across this mysteriously confined location, providing enough power to activate one of several sets of imposing industrial doors. There's just one problem: one of 24 deranged playable slashers is watching your every move, impaling your screaming allies on meat hooks that begin to sprout otherworldly appendages – "daddy fingers," as Game Director Mathieu Côté lovingly refers to them. Escape with your life, and the trial begins anew; get "hooked" three times however, and you'll be fodder for the Entity, an insatiable Lovecraftian monstrosity that hungers for human meat.

In the five years since its launch, the *DbD* community continues to grow and – for a game that launched the same year as Blizzard's *Overwatch* (another multiplayer shooter that's about to be paved over by its own sequel), that's one hell of an impressive exercise in keeping things fresh. Despite its wild success, however, *Dead*



by Daylight had its brushes with potential disaster. When the game's then-publisher Starbreeze Studios experienced financial turmoil two years into its lifespan, Behaviour made the decision to buy the rights and publish the game itself.

"I think [Starbreeze] didn't believe the game could do much more than what [we] had done that far," says Richard. "From that moment on, *DbD* went into overdrive because it was ours."

And that passion shows. Alongside the delightful cameos by *Halloween*'s Michael Myers, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*'s Leatherface and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*'s Freddy Krueger, it wasn't long before even more noteworthy nasties from the worlds of gaming and cinema were added to *DbD*'s roster, each with a hefty amount of care given to their likeness and lore. If someone had told me that *Silent Hill*'s Pyramid Head and *Resident Evil*'s Nemesis would appear in the same game just a few years ago, I likely would have had an aneurysm.

Crossovers are becoming fairly commonplace within gaming as the medium grows in scale and budget, and though *Mortal Kombat X* saw the inclusion of several legendary horror characters as DLC, I find *Dead by Daylight*'s consistent dedication to the genre much more compelling. Five years into its existence, *DbD* has woven existing IPs into its overarching lore rather brilliantly, wholly revitalizing my interest in sitting down for an evening with a competitive multiplayer game. I've watched several of my friends get sucked into the "games as service" vortex within the last decade, logging on each and every week for their time-sensitive loot and rewards. I suppose it only took an unholy union of some of my favourite frightening franchises to finally get me on the (meat) hook. Now... give us Pinhead!

Find our full interview with Creative Director Dave Richard and Game Director Mathieu Côté over at Rue-Morgue.com


A promotional image for the Sleepy Hollow collection. Two models are in a dark, foggy graveyard. One model wears a black and white striped dress and sits next to a jack-o'-lantern. The other model wears a black suit and sits with a skull. The title 'Sleepy Hollow' is in large red script, with 'La Femme en Noir' in smaller red script below it.

Sleepy Hollow

La Femme en Noir

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THE INFLUENCE OF HOWARD PHILLIPS LOVECRAFT AND EDGAR ALLAN POE ON THE HORROR GENRE CANNOT BE UNDERESTIMATED — AND IS CERTAINLY NOT TO BE DEBATED IN THESE PAGES! BUT WHILE BOTH THESE LITERARY GIANTS REIGN, WHICH MAD MIND IS THE MOST MORBID OF THEM ALL? TWO OF OUR WRITERS ENTER THE RING TO BATTLE IT OUT!

LOVECRAFT OR POE: WHOSE WRITINGS ARE MORE MORBID?

H.P. LOVECRAFT

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

"Poe is merely into goth-emo necro play, while HPL is into tentacle hentai!"

EDGAR ALLAN POE

BENOIT BLACK

"Lovecraft told stories, whereas Poe consorted with the demons who reside in his soul and that makes him the clear winner of this match."

LOVECRAFT'S MORBIDITY SPANS THE UNIVERSE, WHILE POE'S IS CONFINED TO A COFFIN OR A CELL, A MANSION AT BEST. What's one decadent aristocratic family in a fallen house compared to demon-sultan bubbling and ravening in the centre of all cosmos? "Oh, my God!" cry Poe's anemic characters. "Yes, the Idiot-God," replies HPL, "accompanied by incessant flutes of mindless gargoyles!" Poe's characters, at worst, mate with the dead. Yawn! HPL's do it with amphibians. Poe is merely into goth-emo necro play, while HPL is into tentacle hentai!

Poe sang sugary praises to womenfolk (preferably dead): the only time HPL ever had a significant female character, it was actually a male spirit possessing a woman's body. You thought it was yucky embracing your wife only to sense the spirit of your dead wife inside? Imagine feeling her father there, instead!

Poe's teeth fetishism is sick in its small way, but for a bit of perspective think of the albino woman raped by an Elder God, and their half-human, half-unnamable offspring — and his invisible giant brother. A razor-wielding ape is scary, I guess, but not as scary as discovering that your grandmother was an ape! Poe wondered: what if you were imprisoned in Inquisition's torture pit? Meh. Lovecraft envisioned sensations of a man whose soul is imprisoned in a rotting corpse.

Admittedly, Poe's Valdemar suffered a similar life-in-death scenario, but has he been driven mad with fright, or forced to recognize he's a ghoul, or a tainted-blooded amphibian descendant? Has anyone in Poe's work watched his entire family rot from the inside, overtaken by an alien entity? The white-shrouded figure at the end of Arthur Gordon Pym is creepy, but is it as sick as Nyarlathotep, the Crawling Chaos; as Shub-Niggurath with its Thousand Young; as the slimy amorphous shoggoths; as the pussy-faced Cthulhu? I don't think so. And did I mention large-scale mating with the humanoid amphibians?

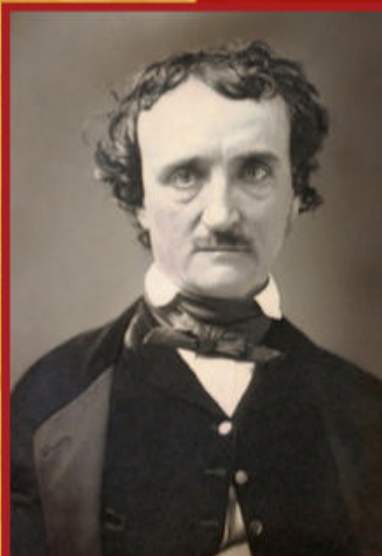
Beat that, Poe! 🐸

YOU KNOW YOU'VE COME TO A GREAT PLACE IN THIS MAGAZINE WHERE THE SUBJECT OF DISCUSSION IS WHETHER THE WORKS OF H.P. LOVECRAFT OUTSHONE THOSE OF EDGAR ALLAN POE FOR SHEER MORBIDITY. Great because these two titans of horror literature brought morbidity to such a pitch in their literature that it ultimately doesn't matter who wins this back page debate. It is you and I, dear reader, who have been winning ever since these twin minds put their deliciously dark imaginations to paper.

That said, it is my contention that, while both scribes displayed an admirable penchant for submerging the nerves into the darkest, dankest recesses of the human imagination, Poe's flights of fancy were coloured with a degree of macabre obsessiveness that has yet to be outdone by anyone, ever. When reading Poe one comes away with the impression that he is not just telling stories, so much as visiting meticulously rendered tragedies upon his own tormented soul.

Poe's classic short story "Ligeia" is an excellent example, a meticulously rendered portrait of a woman at the height of her beauty, intelligence, and vivacity, who succumbs to illness and death. Poe, writing as the distraught narrator, remarries and soon poisons his new wife in an effort to re-experience the event, only to revive from her dying flesh his one and only love... Ligeia. Call it romanticism of the blackest sort; it's clear upon reading this story that Poe's words ushered from his unforgiving tell-tale heart.

No matter how much I can admire Lovecraft's love of cosmic horror, I can't get around the fact that he was a child of the pulps, where Poe's literature resides somewhere between bleak romanticism, tragic melancholia, and homicidal confessional. Lovecraft told stories, whereas Poe consorted with the demons who reside in his soul and that, dear reader, makes him the clear winner of this match. 🐸



LAST ISSUE'S WINNER
AS VOTED BY YOU ON TWITTER

WHAT IS THE BEST PERFORMANCE IN A HORROR
MOVIE FROM A NON-HUMAN CASTMEMBER?

Jed from
The Thing

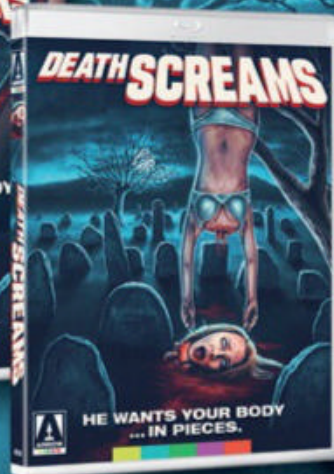
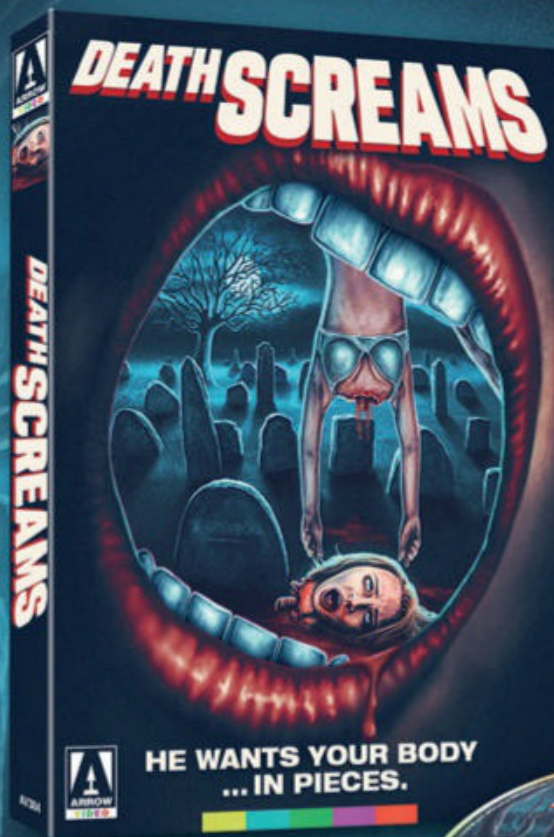
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The truck
from *Duel*

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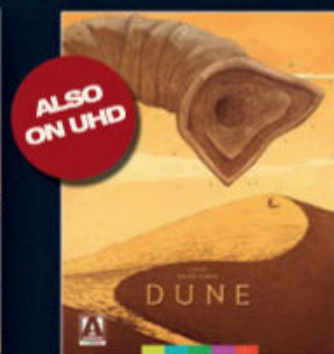
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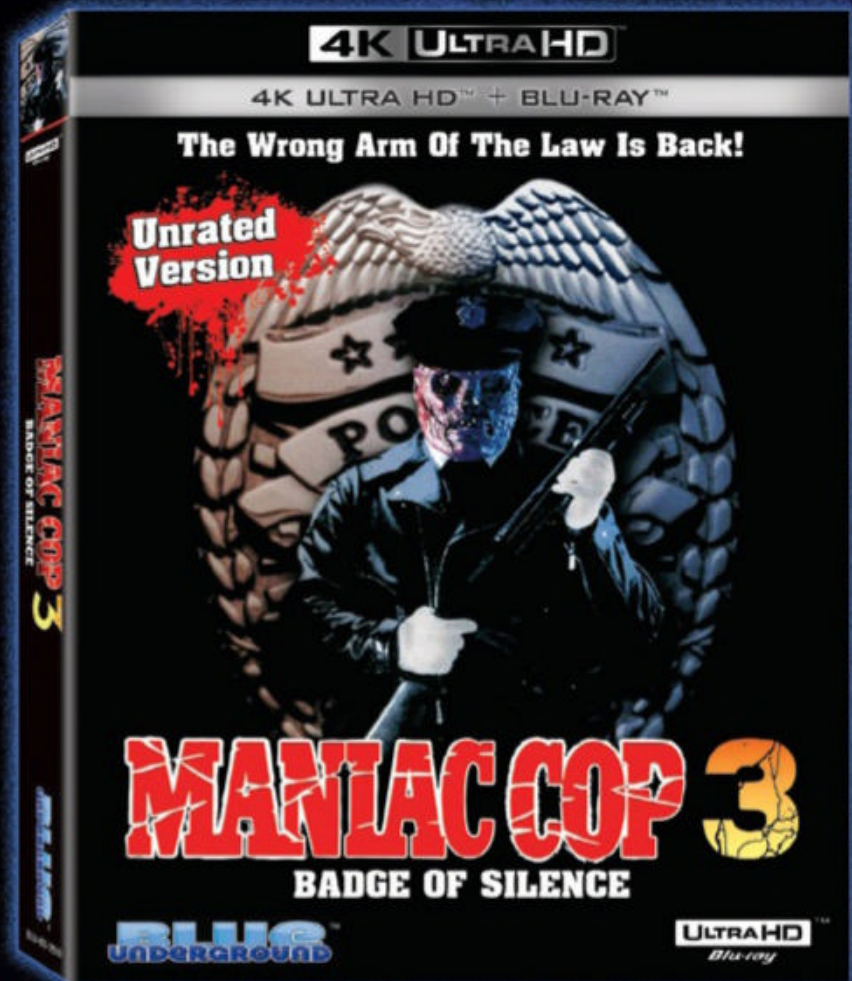
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